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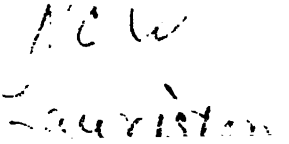

THE TWENTY-FIRST BURR

BY

VICTOR LAURISTON

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THE TWENTY-FIRST BURR

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CHAPTER I

THE DAY OF HUGE EVENT

Our lives are mostly desert wastes of petty things. Yet here and there in a wide expanse of Nothing Doing stands out one day, an oasis of huge event, whose miraged memory we mark in red—yes, or in black.

Such a day, vivid, outstanding, unforgettable, Laura Winright knew when she again met George Annisford after two years' absence.

She had just returned from Europe, called home by her father's letter.

Annisford, she knew, would meet her at New York.

He did not.

That was the first shock which startled Laura Winright into stark attention.

Her father, then, must be even worse than his last letter had intimated. That was the one conclusion she could draw from her fiancé's default. With characteristic impetuosity she straightway used the long distance telephone to reach Annisford at Detroit. Then, being a normal woman, she forgot to ask most of the questions that had fluttered excitedly in her mind.

"Oh, see here, chick!" protested Annisford jestingly across six hundred miles of wire. "You've come down on us like the wolf on the fold. We haven't time to send out for crackers and cheese. . . . Of course your father

is just fine and dandy. Why shouldn't he be? . . . Now, you might just as well stay in New York and do a bit of shopping. You can't get the styles or the bargains we have right here at Winright's but it'll be something to tell Maitland Port that your summer outfit came from Fifth Avenue. . . . Well, come right on, if you're so utterly perverse! . . . Now, chick, there's no blamed use asking if I love you! Of course I do. . . . Well, now, that's a question! Why do I talk like this? Why—why—well, you came down on us just like the Assyrian, as I was saying. I mean, like the wolf. Nobody expected you home for at least six months. . . ."

Annisford said a lot more; but these were the significant words that haunted Laura Winright.

Her return from Europe, in response to her father's urgent summons, had surprised her fiancé.

Her father seemed in his usual good health.

Annisford could see no reason whatever for her insistence on reaching Maitland Port without delay.

She wished she had her father's letter in her hand-bag, instead of in her steamer trunk. But, anyway, she could remember its purport quite well. Adam Winright was ill—so ill that he felt alarmed—he wished to see her before he died—would she come home by the next boat?

Throughout the voyage, that message had stood out before her mind in characters of fire. Its terror dominated all the dangers that lurked in wait for the ocean liner. Her father was ill, perhaps dying, at Maitland Port. At whatever risk to herself, she must see him before he died.

As she left the telephone booth a few vivid phrases in his letter flashed before her mind:

"Laura, you must come home at once. Come by the next boat. I am far from a well man, and there are things

I cannot write in a letter, that I must tell you before I die . . ."

Laura caught a night train for the west. Then she wished she had telegraphed her father, at Maitland Port. On after thought she telegraphed him in the early morning, from Albany.

At noon when the train pulled into Buffalo, George Annisford, big and beaming, joined her at lunch.

"How is he?"

Her anxious question tore like shrapnel through the young man's story of how he had come down from Detroit to meet her.

"He? Who? Is it a conundrum?"

A flash from Laura's blue eyes wilted Annisford's mirth.

"Who? Father, of course!"

"He's bright as the lark that sings at dawn from yonder hedgerow. . . . Here am I, chick, old-countryizing my conversation to please your Anglicized taste, and you look like a funeral! Very likely your dad will die of surprise when you come prancing in so unexpectedly, but . . . oh, say, you surely never meant all that rot about going for a Red Cross nurse!"

Laura Winright, bewildered, watched Buffalo slide past the windows, the city merging into straggling suburbs and wide fields. George was surprised at her homecoming. Her father would be surprised. Yet her father had himself written her to come! The problem grew singularly puzzling. Of course she must have misunderstood his letter—

Yet there were lines of it photographed on her memory:

"*Laura, you must come home at once. Come by the next boat. I am far from a well man,* and there are

things I cannot write in a letter, that I must tell you before I die . . ."

She stared at Annisford.

Adam Winright must have some deep reason for keeping his serious illness a secret from the man nearest him, his partner, young Annisford.

"Tom's in Detroit," breezed Annisford. "He's filling the toes of my shoes for the day. He was powerful anxious to welcome the prodigal daughter personally and to murder the overgrown ox with his own howitzer. You see, patriotic citizens don't kill fatted calves any more; they let them grow up into beef. Oh, I say, I'd better wire your father—"

"I did, this morning, from Albany."

"Good! That will give Turkey Bird time to toast your slippers before the grate and chase the moth balls out of your pink kimono."

Laura refused to laugh.

"You're sure father is quite well, George?"

"Never better." No shadow clouded Annisford's outlook. "We'll see the show at Detroit to-night, and—"

"We'll go right on to Maitland Port the minute we reach Detroit."

"Why not take a taxi out to Woodlawn Cemetery? It's just as dead."

She was in no mood to laugh.

"I mean it," she declared. "I'm not going to argue, either. I simply must get home."

Long before reaching Detroit, their protracted argument had ended in victory for Laura. She would take the next train for Maitland Port. She fretted at the fifteen minutes' delay between trains. She refused to leave the Union Station.

Tom Winright filled in the interval. A very dignified

brother he was, though in his early twenties, tall, with soldierly moustache and steel grey eyes that lit when they rested on her.

"How is he—father?" Again the anxious question surged to Laura's lips.

Her brother, she felt sure, must know of her father's illness, even if Annisford did not.

Tom twisted the tips of his moustache.

"Laura," he rejoined, with an air of bantering philosophy, "this world is full of uncertainties. But when I left Maitland Port on Sunday there was one certainty. Dad felt fine. Did you ram any U-boats on the trip across?"

"N-no." Laura's mind, preoccupied with her father's illness, quite failed to grasp the question. "No, I suppose not. I—"

She halted. Her brother's slender fingers, curving, with a swoop imprisoned a fly that had settled on the back of the seat. Tom, still chatting serenely, drew a pin from his coat lapel and studied his prisoner with the cold, critical eye of a skilled anatomist. Laura's lips trembled.

"Tom! That's sheer cruelty!"

Tom smiled.

"Swat the fly!"

"But don't torture him."

Tom carelessly brushed aside the mangled remains.

"Never again, Laurie," he vowed. "Yet there's so many millions of flies, I think you really could spare me just one. I'd like to take the run back to Maitland Port with you," he went on, "but—well, our friend Annisford has first call. Eh?"

Laura flushed. The jesting tones of both men chimed in ill with her apprehensive mood. The blue coated,

dogmatic announcer at the exit bellowed a warning of the north-bound train.

Tom, stooping, gravely kissed the fair-haired girl. She gazed into his eyes.

"You're sure that dad's all right, Tom?"

"Positive."

As she passed with Annisford through smoke and noise and confusion to the train, she saw again those words, written in letters of fire:

"Laura, you must come home at once. Come by the next boat. I am far from a well man, and there are things I cannot write in a letter, that I must tell you before I die . . ."

An early evening breeze blew off Lake Huron when the two descended from the train. The last red kiss of sunset lingered lovingly on the cedar-clad cliff that overhung the shadowy harbour of Maitland Port. Away above them dozed the little lake town; about them lay the shadowed harbour and the darkened wharves, with gloomy buildings and ghostly spars, and from beyond the sand bar at the river mouth came the beat of waves on the beach. With quick glances Annisford searched the deserted station platform.

"Why isn't the car here?" he demanded.

"The car! Is it possible?"

"It most emphatically is *not* possible for that chauffeur ever to be on time, or to be on hand at all when he's wanted. As for the car, chick—oh, I suppose it's one of your father's surprises—eh? He's like providence, is Adam Winright—he moves in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. Anyway, the car's not here. Now that shoe leather is so abominably high, we'll have to hire a taxi or—"

He checked himself. A mud-bespattered car whirled up. The driver, leaping to the platform, came up to Laura Winright. She noticed he was dark, and young. He held out his hand.

"I'm Nick Ross," he announced. "Is this Laura Winright?" He gripped her hand. "Mr. Winright just now telephoned me—"

Already he was assisting Laura to her seat.

"Thank you," she said, and beamed on him.

Annisford took his place beside her. "Ross," he said, leaning forward, "you're an impertinent pup." His tone was perfectly good-natured.

"Annisford," said Ross, without turning from the wheel, "you're another."

Laura smiled.

"Really he's very nice," she whispered. "Who is he, anyway? I don't remember any Nick Ross in Maitland Port."

"He's the chauffeur."

Laura felt a shock. A mere servant had presumed to run up to her on the station platform and to shake hands, yes, and to call her Laura Winright. She glanced at him again. Beneath the arc light that swung above the station platform, the young man's lips were drawn tight. That bespoke hurt; or, at least, an effort at self-control.

"Castle Sunset!" she commanded imperiously. She meant to put the presuming chauffeur in his place.

Then, suddenly, an affrighted idea drove all thought of dignity from her mind. She leaned forward.

"Just a minute, Ross."

The chauffeur turned. This time he played superbly the rôle of deferential servant.

"At what time did Mr. Winright telephone you?"

"Eight or nine minutes ago, I should say, Miss Winright." He glanced at his watch. "That would be—

let me see—two minutes to eight. Yes, I'm certain the clock in the garage struck the hour just as I started the car." He seemed oddly eager to fix the minutest detail in her mind. "You will excuse my being a little late?"

"It is of no moment."

Laura's manner rebuked the dark-faced young man's unforgotten presumption.

Then she put him out of her mind. She sank back on the leather-cushioned seat. Her eyes closed.

The nervous strain that had oppressed her ever since her father's letter reached her in England, was gone now. She was free, at last, to joy in these familiar sights and sounds—the darkness creeping across Lake Huron, the road up Harbour Hill, the lighted clock-tower in the distant Square, whose dial, as they turned into wide West Street, marked nine minutes after eight.

The apprehension that had haunted her all day vanished with the chauffeur's words. Whatever the more distant future might hold, in a few moments now she must find her father waiting to welcome her.

Annisford spoke.

"Nobody loves him," he whispered, nodding toward the chauffeur. "So he just stays in the garage and invents inventions. He's invented a long wiry one and a square black one."

Laura laughed.

"We won't bother about him," she commented. "In a minute or two we'll see the house of ghosts."

Both laughed, this time. That jest reached back to their childhood, when Judith MacTurk, the old Scotch housekeeper, had told them dismal stories that put their hair on end.

"Turkey Bird did hand out some tall old yarns," laughed Annisford. "Do you remember that night I caught her wandering about the house in the dark? I

asked her why she didn't have a light, and she said it would scare away the ghosts. She was horribly fond of spectres, wasn't she?"

Again Laura laughed. From a source of childish terror, old Mrs. MacTurk's ghosts had degenerated into theme for maturer jest.

"See," she added, quickly, "there's Castle Sunset now!"

"And not a blue ghostlight glimmering from a single turret," flashed Annisford. "Ghost-lights *are* blue, aren't they?"

The car swept up toward a huge, horned monster darkly outlined against night sky and river valley.

"Let us down at the front gate," commanded Miss Winright.

The headlights lit a tall, serrated iron fence; and beyond it the huge monster, illumined, grew into a grey old house, and the horns into turrets topped with slender spires. Beyond, the sunset had gone to sleep in the grey bed of the lake. The dismal wash of the waters came to them, and the scent of the chill lake breeze.

The chauffeur with silent deference helped Laura to descend. His fingers seemed to linger on her gloved hand. With queer intentness, Laura Winright realized that the young man's hand trembled.

She hurried with Annisford up the winding walk, her eyes anxiously scanning the broad porch, and the rustic seats on the lawn.

"It's strange"—with a sudden start of returning apprehension—"that father didn't come to the station. Where is he?"

The façade of the strange old house overhung her like a threatening cloud.

"It's all so dark!" she breathed.

The front door stood a trifle ajar, though the May evening was chill. Annisford stepped aside.

"You go first, George," urged Laura Winright.

The young man, entering, snapped on the light. He did not need it; he could have threaded his way through the house blindfold. To the girl's trembling heart the light brought a world of cheer.

"Father will be in the Ghost Room." She essayed to laugh.

Annisford knew. Always, the old man had clung to his library, which, shut off at the end of the long hall, assured him the solitude he craved and an unbroken view of the brilliant Huron sunsets. She remembered as a little girl sitting on his knee in that room, watching the changing panorama of scarlet and gold.

Past the foot of the broad staircase they entered shadow. The library door at the end of the hall stood open; but the only light from its black recess was the tiny glow of a coal in the grate.

"Is father there?" questioned Laura.

Annisford pushed the door wider. Adam Winright sat there, his shadowy figure bowed over the library table.

"Father!" cried Laura.

She stretched out her arms to him. Silence was the only answer.

"Poor dear! He's gone to sleep!" she told Annisford, in tones tremulously low.

She stole into the room, her light footfalls making scarce a sound, her soul intent on glad surprise. Annisford followed, with steps instinctively hesitating.

Laura came up softly behind the old man's chair. Her heart felt glad. So, many and many a time, she had surprised him dozing in his chair.

"Father!" she cried, her tone a-thrill.

Still there was no answer.

"Father! Don't you hear me? It is I—Laura."

The man at the table never stirred. The girl glanced at Annisford, her breath coming and going, terror in her eyes. Annisford, bending over the old man, listened.

"Mr. Winright!"

In the quiet room where a moment before they could almost have heard their own heart-beats, his voice rang strangely loud.

A sudden flame in the silence that followed leapt from the red embers in the grate. Its glow kindled the girl's terrified face.

"What is it?" She commenced horribly to understand. "It can't—oh, surely, it can't be—"

Annisford gripped her hand.

"Be brave, dear," he whispered.

She tried to be brave. Annisford, stepping to the wall, pressed a push-button. Then she saw him standing at the telephone in the hall, impatiently banging the receiver up and down.

"I want Doctor Chalmers." His tone was peremptory. "Tell him to come at once. Gone on a case, eh?" There was a moment of silence. "Then I must get someone else."

Again he jabbed fiercely at the push-button. In the hall sounded hasty, excited footsteps.

"Right here, Mrs. MacTurk!" commanded Annisford.

He turned to Laura at last. She still stood like a statue, uncomprehending.

A man's voice came to them from the hall.

"Is that you, Winright?"

Then:

"Annisford!" The cry burst from the newcomer's

lips. "What has happened? Did you reach him in time?"

"Doctor Chalmers! The very man I've been trying to reach."

Already the stout little doctor was kneeling beside his patient.

"Mr. Winright telephoned me less than ten minutes ago." As he spoke, he felt and listened, his florid face intent.

Silence dwelt in the room. Laura, relinquishing Annisford's arm, sank into a chair. With the gaze of one fascinated, she watched the physician at his work. Her lips parted in a soundless question.

"He told me"—the doctor worked on—"told me he wanted to live—till Laura came—he had a message—"

Laura shivered. Chalmers, looking up at last, reluctantly faced her. He shook his head.

"That was ten minutes ago, Miss Winright . . . and I am ten minutes too late."

CHAPTER II

THE HOUSE OF GHOSTS

In the living-room at Castle Sunset, George Annisford sat alone before the fire. It was now past midnight. In the emergency, the young man had taken command and possession of the place and ordered things as he saw fit, promptly and with decision as was his nature.

Laura was in no condition to direct affairs, and Tom, whom Annisford was trying to call by long distance telephone, could not in any event reach Maitland Port till next day.

The tragedy had jolted George, and he knew it must have jolted Laura. Annisford had no great amount of imagination, but it needed no imagination for him to realize how Laura must feel. The more he thought, the sorrier he was for her.

He filled his pipe, and lit it with a coal from the grate. The fumes of nicotine would help shut out the harrowing aspect of the tragedy. Annisford wanted to shut it out. It was too blamed bad, but—well, it was done now and couldn't be helped. There was no use allowing oneself to feel tough about it. So mused Annisford.

He rose, and half closed the double doors. Across the hall in the unlit parlour, Adam Winright lay under a white coverlet. "It's too blamed bad," repeated Annisford, and drew one door tight. Then he went back to the fire.

As he did so, the telephone summoned him to the far end of the hall.

This, mused Annisford, must be Tom, calling from Detroit. He was right. It took some moments to get the connection. Annisford, however, did not trouble to turn on any light. With businesslike directness he told Tom what had happened.

From the other end of the wire came a choking sob, and a long, tragic silence.

"See here, Tom," urged Annisford, "there's no blamed use buckling. You've simply got to keep up. Laura went all to pieces, of course; it'll need all your pluck and mine to get her back to cheerfulness. Just put Macey in charge at the store, and come right down here on the first train. Let's see—you can't get in till seven tomorrow morning? That'll be all right. I'll have Nick Ross meet you. Now, hustle and get ready."

Action, he knew—any kind of action—would divert Tom's attention from the tragedy itself. Keep him busy, and the thing would work out gradually. Tom now insisted on asking questions. Annisford held back nothing.

Then he went back to the fire.

Laura's collapse was natural, she being a woman; but he had not expected Tom to buckle and cry like that. Why, when the Colonel, his own father, died—it was heart failure, and all happened in a moment—he had just said, between gasps, "George, boy, when we meet again I'll have a heluva lot to tell you." And George had replied, "Save me an earful, anyway." That was all there was to it. He had travelled a lot, had George Annisford; he had never cried at railway stations; and this journey was only a bit longer than the others. If folks would only remember that!

Annisford re-lit his pipe, which had gone out, and glanced at the clock on the mantel. From over town came the deep tones of a bell.

"One—two!"

Adam Winright would never hear that again! Annisford couldn't help that reflection. But he tried assiduously to narcotize it into the background of his mind.

The door bell jangled.

The household were all asleep, except perhaps old Mrs. MacTurk. Annisford went to the door.

"Oh!" he ejaculated; and, without enthusiasm, admitted Doctor Chalmers.

"I couldn't sleep," explained the ruddy-faced doctor, "so I decided I'd come over and sit up a while with you." He let Annisford take his hat, and himself settled in Annisford's chair.

Annisford drew up another chair, and resumed his pipe. He glanced once or twice at Chalmers. He did not know Chalmers well. As a boy, he had spent much time in Maitland Port; but in recent years, except for flying visits, the management of the business at Detroit had pretty well monopolized his time.

"You got word to Tom?" asked the doctor, presently.

"Yes. He was awfully cut up. He's coming down first thing in the morning."

"How is Miss Winright?"

"She's asleep. I made them all turn in."

Annisford looked hard at the physician. Doctors, he mused, didn't usually call on the patients they had lost, particularly in the dead of night. Doctors usually were able to sleep when they found time for it. Even to unobservant Annisford it presently became evident that, whether or not the alleged sleeplessness were a subterfuge, the stout little doctor had come with the deliberate purpose of asking questions. The most obvious course was to answer everything, and to volunteer whatever additional information seemed apropos. This George Annisford did.

He asked questions on his part, not out of curiosity,

for he never was curious, but from sheer natural friendliness.

"Winright always puzzled me," ventured Chalmers. "I probably knew him better than did most people in Maitland Port, and I can't say that I really knew him."

"He struck most people as odd? Eh?"

"That's just it. He kept to himself. He made no friends in Maitland Port. He didn't want them."

"Hardly."

"I'd almost have thought"—Chalmers spoke very deliberately—"that he came here for the sake of solitude. He kept to his grounds, to his house, to that one room where he died." His words held an interrogative note.

"I never imagined him ill."

"Nor I. He seemed never better in his life."

"Yet you said heart failure?"

Doctor Chalmers silently scratched his head. Annisford filled the gap in the conversation.

"Wouldn't there be previous symptoms? Occasional light attacks?" His manner was indifferent.

The doctor eyed him queerly.

"I'm puzzled." His tone was self-accusatory. "I must have been careless. Tom did tell me his father seemed ill. That was three or four weeks ago. Then Winright himself came to me. 'Is there anything the matter with me?' he asked. I examined him, and do you know, I found not the slightest trace of heart trouble, or anything else? He was sound as a bell. So I thought, anyway—for of course it *is* heart failure. My examination then must have been at fault." The firelight lit his ruddy, troubled face. "We all make mistakes, Annisford. If I'd only been a bit more careful then——"

His voice faded.

"Tom took it terribly hard," put in Annisford.

Chalmers nodded.

"He must have known he was dying?"

"Yes. He knew. I was just leaving my office when the 'phone rang, and my car was waiting outside. I had a little trouble cranking, but I reached here inside ten minutes."

"He wanted to see Laura?"

"Evidently. Apparently he thought she might not come till morning, and hoped to last through the night. That's a man for you"—the doctor's voice rang. "Not a bit of terror in his tone, Annisford—he spoke just as coolly as though he were asking for a cup of coffee."

"What did he say?"

"What he said was so utterly out of the ordinary. "I didn't understand at first. One doesn't look for a man to say such things so calmly. 'Please repeat that' I told him. Then I got his words: 'Chalmers, this is Adam Winright. I am dying. Please come at once. I must live till Laura comes. I have a message for her.' I said, 'I'm coming'—"

"Then he must have hung up the receiver and crossed to the table and sat down—"

"And died immediately."

The flame in the grate leapt up, kindling the doctor's troubled face.

"He was quite alone?" he questioned.

Annisford nodded. "Yes. Katie went out at seven, and Turkey Bird spent the evening gossiping with Fan Sifton. You know Fan Sifton, the unclaimed treasure with the wheezy old setter? Why, I can remember when Fan—"

"Sh!"

Annisford stared in surprise.

"Did you hear that?" demanded Chalmers.

"What?"

"I'm positive I heard someone at those doors."

"Nonsense." Annisford's tone was careless. "Why, I can remember when I was a kid and Fan Sifton—"

"There it goes again," insisted the doctor. "Like something choking."

Yet he made no move to investigate. Annisford gazed a moment at the ruddy-faced little man. He was horribly frightened. With a careless laugh the young fellow went to the door, and glanced up and down the hall.

"Nothing doing," he reported, cheerily.

Then he fancied a glimmer of light at the end of the hall. "Excuse me, doctor. I'll investigate." He stepped boldly enough down the hall toward the Ghost Room. Neither non-existent ghosts nor real dead folk had any terrors for him.

Sure enough, the library was a glow of light. Annisford eyed the electrolier. "Did I turn that light on when I was telephoning Tom?" he asked himself. "No, I did not. I'm sure I did not. But I must have."

The matter was inconsequential, anyway. Annisford snapped off the light, and turned back toward the living-room. At the foot of the stair he glanced up; then ascended, none too quietly, to the landing above. Laura's door was closed. He listened a moment, heard nothing, imagined nothing; finally, descending, rejoined the doctor before the fire.

"I guess you're nervous to-night," he adjudicated.

Once more from over town came the notes of the deep-toned bell.

"One—two—three!"

Annisford again filled his pipe.

"He could have deliberately concealed some of the symptoms from me," said the doctor. "It must have been that. Yet, if he wished to conceal his illness, why did he seek an examination at all?" He puzzled. "It is all of a part with his general reputation, though."

"You Maitland Port people thought him eccentric?"

"Decidedly—or deep."

"He wasn't eccentric in business. Of course," conceded Annisford, "he was reticent. He never discussed his private affairs with me, though I was the one man nearest to him. Yet he was a careful, methodical, capable business man from corns to bald spot. If he wanted a letter of ten years ago, he could place his fingers on it in ten seconds. He could tell to a cent how much we had in any line of stock, or how much were each day's sales and profits in each department. That store of ours is organized to the hilt. Adam Winright put in the first time-clocks in Detroit, I guess; everyone from the president down had to punch them. There's a room full of the stuff at Detroit right now; I can tell you when every employé was on and off for ten years back. You can see my record, and Tom's, and Mr. Winright's own record. Adam Winright was a miracle of system. Maybe he overdid it. Of course he didn't mingle in Detroit society, or mix in politics—no call for that, you know. He was just a business man—hadn't another interest."

"Except Laura."

"Another interest in Detroit, I mean. She was here."

"That always puzzled us," explained Chalmers. "Why he lived in Detroit and the children in Maitland Port, and he so rarely saw them. I used to puzzle it over when I was younger. I'm inquisitive, you know. The children made a few friends, but when they got old enough to mix in our society, Tom went to Detroit, and Laura abroad. Some people used to say Mr. Winright was hard up, but I always thought he must be comfortably fixed. He"—the doctor hesitated—"he'd be worth all of fifty thousand, I should say? Oh, thirty thousand, anyway?"

George Annisford almost laughed. Only the thought of Adam Winright across the hall muzzled his mirth.

"Fifty thousand! Why, Adam Winright was a millionaire twice over!"

Chalmers stared.

"Who gets the money?" he blurted.

"I don't know. I've never seen his will. Of course he'll have one. If he hadn't, the money would go half to Laura and half to Tom."

"But his brother, Harold?"

Annisford gazed oddly at the physician.

"Harold? Oh, Harold died years ago." What Annisford thought he knew, he was complacently sure of. "Winright told you so, didn't he?"

"He never told me much of anything."

They were silent a moment. A coal in the grate split, with a loud report.

"What was that?"

Chalmers glanced suspiciously about him.

"Just that coal," assured Annisford.

"No. There." The doctor, springing up, pointed toward the door. "Didn't you see something?"

Annisford laughed.

"Sit down. You're nervous. Did you ever hear Turkey Bird tell about the ghost in the old mill back of Dungannon? You know, folks driving by on dark nights used to see blue lights flittering past the windows and—"

He broke off, grinning.

"What you saw was a shadow on the hall carpet. The moonlight shines through the front window and there's vines outside, and when the wind blows the shadow of the vines shifts. As for Harold, he was drowned before Mr. Winright married. I've heard he was a bad lot. Guess the brothers didn't get along any too well. But Harold was drowned years and years ago."

Chalmers fixed his gaze on the cheery fire.

"Mr. Winright will be buried at Detroit, beside his wife, I suppose?"

It was Annisford's turn to stare into the fire. "Tom will arrange all that," he said at last. "He'll be here in the morning. I must send the car for him."

Catching up the scuttle, he deluged the fire with coal. The cannel cracked noisily as it caught. Chalmers, hunched in his chair, with fascinated gaze again sought the gap in the double doors where he had fancied the moving shadow.

"I heard someone."

"It's only the wind in the trees."

"No. Listen." Rising, he tip-toed toward the door; but halted half-way, shuddering. "Can't you hear it?"

Annisford's lips parted in a laugh.

"Nonsense, doctor. You're just—"

He stopped short.

There was a gasp, a stifled cry, from the room where the dead man lay; and then the sound of a heavy fall. Annisford, slow to hear but instant to act, crossed the hall and gripped the door-knob.

"It's locked!" he exclaimed.

Without hesitation, he flung his full weight against the door. It gave, presently, with a crash. The room he had left dark was now a blaze of light. Annisford glimpsed the bier where the dead man lay, covered with a white sheet; and then on the floor beside it a crumpled little heap of pink and white.

He knelt.

"Laura!" he cried. "Wake up, Laura!"

CHAPTER III

THE PRINT OF A HAND

The first thing that fixed itself in Laura Winright's mind was the monotonous beat of waves upon a sandy beach.

She ran along the shore, the waves lapping her bare feet; and before her ran old Adam Winright, always just out of reach, laughing when she cried out to him to carry her.

The pursuit seemed unending. In darkness she ran, yet despite the darkness she saw him clearly, just beyond her reach.

At last she cried, and stretched out her hands.

Then she saw the sunlight.

A dusty sunbeam streamed through tall windows. Then she was not on the beach, after all. She was in her own old room at Castle Sunset. She felt terribly tired after all the running, and wished she could lie down and go to sleep.

A long while afterward she realized that she was in bed. She had been sleeping, and felt not at all rested. After all, she had not been running. That was merely a horrid dream.

The beat of the waves was reality, though. It came from Lake Huron at the foot of the hill. From where she lay she could see the sunshine again, and the waving tops of cedars that fringed the hillcrest.

Then she saw the nurse, and knew that she must have

been ill. She felt tired anyway. There was a vague something that must be attended to at once, but—

She woke after a long time, in the dark. Then she remembered having caught herself walking in her sleep. She had heard some talk betwixt George Annisford and Doctor Chalmers. Then—it seemed that there was something she had lost, which must be found.

In the morning, when there was light, she would find it.

Again she woke, and saw the nurse standing between her and the light.

Perhaps the nurse would remember what she herself had forgotten.

"Nurse!"

The nurse came in swift silence, with a sweet smile.

"You are better, dear."

Her uniform was primly starchy, but her voice suggested the soft rustle of silks.

"Yes, I'm better," agreed Laura; and forgot her question.

It was not before the next day that her clearing mind again essayed the question to which she seemed subconsciously driven.

"Nurse," she asked, "how long is it—?"

"It's only a few days. You'll lie quiet, now, and rest —rest—"

Her voice trailed off, suggesting to a tired spirit a thought of welcome repose. Laura, yielding to the impulse of the stronger mind, slipped back again into forgetfulness. Yet this time she struggled though vainly for mastery of herself.

Vain day seemed to follow vain day, with the insistent question in the back of her mind still unasked. For hours at a time the girl lay weak, trying to piece out in her mind what of the stuff she remembered was actual fact and what was mere horrid phantasmagoria. George was

in it. This nurse was in it. Old Mrs. MacTurk was in it, her gnarled face anxiously wrinkled. And Tom was in it—stately, gallant, courageous Tom. Her heart warmed to him. She could always count on Tom.

"Where is Mr. Annisford?" she found herself asking the nurse.

"In Detroit. But your brother is here."

Laura lay quiet. Doggedly she fought off the inclination to sleep again.

The nurse's hair, under her little white cap, was dark—black, almost—yet seen in the sunlight it turned to fine gold. Her eyes were brown. Yes, unmistakably, they were brown. Yet when she smiled, they lit.

No, she was not an ordinary nurse.

"Nurse," the girl began hesitantly, "the man—you know, the man who was with my father? Who was he?"

"There was no one with him, dear."

Laura made no immediate answer. The nurse drew her rocker close to the bed, and, taking the patient's hand in hers, thoughtfully studied the lines.

"I know you now," said Laura at last. "You're Glory Adair."

She talked to keep awake. Anything was preferable to being lulled back into that clinging, horrible forgetfulness.

She had been weak before; now she began to feel strong, and rebellious in her strength. Glory Adair looked at her questioningly.

"Did you ever have your hand read?"

"No. I don't believe in palmistry."

"Then I'll read your hand."

Laura resented the offer just a little. Manifestly, the nurse divined that her mind dwelt on other things; and manifestly also, the nurse had decided to lure her into chatter over non-essentials rather than leave her to brood.

Yet she surrendered to the compelling brown eyes.

"You will make a quick recovery. I see no set-back. In place of worry you will experience peace of mind and comforting thoughts."

"Bosh!" thought Laura. "Mental suggestion to meet my case. No palm-reading at all."

The nurse seemed to hesitate. "A mystery hangs over you. I see a fair woman—"

Laura smiled. Had it not been for the tragic shadow overhanging her, this travesty on the familiar stock-in-trade of the fortune-teller would have sent her into peals of laughter.

"You have lived in pleasant circumstances for years. As a baby, though, you were not so happily circumstanced."

"Anyone could guess that." Laura's pessimism was itself a hint of growing interest. "Father's business grew from small beginnings. And—"

A glance from the brown eyes soothed her.

"Your mother is dead. You had one sister. She is also dead."

Evident error always compels contradiction.

"I never had a sister."

"Your mother died when you were a baby," returned the nurse. "Your sister died before you were born." Her tone was pleasantly firm. "Your hand tells me of that sister, and it is a witness I will believe against the world." Thoughtfully she studied the finger-tips, and the mounts at the foot of each digit, and the fine, complicated lines of the palm. "You are loving, impetuous, quick to jump at conclusions—"

"And my conclusions—are they right?"

"Not always—not often—but, on rare occasions."

Laura felt slighted. The nurse purred on.

"Your life in Maitland Port has been very uneventful.

Your hand shows no great emotional stress, though you are capable of great emotions, of love and of sacrifice. Intense self-sacrifice—for a loved one." Her brown eyes, gazing into distance, seemed to compass worlds that Laura Winright could not see. "In recent years you have travelled much, but for pleasure. Here"—she indicated—"a line is broken. You are in great danger. A cloud hovers about you. It threatens you less than it threatens others, but all the time it seems to follow you."

She paused. Laura shivered.

The nurse noticed.

"There—I've talked too much. You will lie quiet, now, and rest—rest—rest—"

"I will not rest," Laura breathed, rebelliously.

The nurse rose and crossed to the window. Laura surrendered. Yet her fascinated eyes followed Glory Adair. She was patiently disciplining her mind to think. Next time she would not be beaten in her quest—no, not even by a silky-voiced, steel-souled nurse.

She tried to piece things together. She had walked in her sleep that night her father died, had found herself in the lower hall, had heard George Annisford and Doctor Chalmers—yes, and then for some reason had gone to the room where her father lay.

She did not remember leaving that room. She remembered nothing after that. Her illness must have been from nervous shock. Very well, she felt stronger now.

Yet there was a missing link somewhere in it all that she could not place.

"Miss Adair," she said next morning; and held up her hands, the white palms uppermost. "Go on."

"I told you that you were loving and impetuous," murmured Miss Adair. "On occasion, too, you seem very determined."

She smiled. Laura felt with sudden disappointment that her palm reading had been merely jest.

"Everything you told me yesterday that was true you could have learned from Doctor Chalmers. The things you could not have learned from Doctor Chalmers were —*mistakes.*" Laura softened the word that came first to her lips.

"Lies, you mean?" Glory's tone was placid. "But your hand tells no lies—neither does it make mistakes. None whatever. It is a witness that can be trusted to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. You may so delude yourself that you will swear to a lie in the witness box, firmly believing it the truth, but—you cannot delude your hand."

She smiled in deprecation of her burst of earnestness. Then she sat down beside the bed.

"Merely as a test," she suggested, "let me repeat a few things your hand tells me, that assuredly nobody in Maitland Port can know. You were not born in Maitland Port, but a long distance away—perhaps in another country? You travelled much the first year of your life. After that you lived in the same place many years? Tell me, isn't that all true?"

From the patient's hand she lifted her eager, confident gaze to the patient's face.

"No."

Glory sat dumfounded.

Laura Winright hastened to qualify.

"I was not born in Maitland Port. That is true. I lived here many, many years, and never visited the store at Detroit, even—just lived here with Tom and Mamma Judy. She and old Angus—he's dead now—took care of Castle Sunset; and Mamma Judy took care of me after my mother died. I never saw my mother, to remember. Dad did not really live here till he retired, and

Mr. Annisford became manager. You thought we were queer, queer people, didn't you?"

"Rather! And your mother?"

Laura did not answer.

For the first time in all her life the fact stood out nakedly, that no one had told her of her mother, that all she knew was by her own inference.

Glory Adair nodded ever so slightly. Her palm-reading was not disproven.

"Doctor Chalmers," she intervened, heroically, "said you must not talk."

"Will it hurt me? Ask my hand."

"I see no danger there—rather good. You have your mind set on getting well; there is something you have decided to do. What you think of doing, I can't tell. It will baffle you a long time. Nevertheless, you may win. You are very determined, Miss Winright."

Laura felt her interest enhanced.

"But you're a nurse," she protested. "Scientific. Exact. Are you really so superstitious as to believe in palmistry?"

"I am not superstitious. I am sane. Palmistry is not guess-work. It is science. For thousands of years it has been studied. It is taught by regularly constituted schools, and has its literature. It is quite logical. No two natures in the world are precisely alike; nor are any two hands. Why should not the lines of the palm furnish a clue to the character?"

"But—can you really tell the future—?"

Laura was all eagerness now. Glory Adair shook her head.

"I can tell character. I can tell the past, to some extent. As to the future, I can tell what you will do under any given set of circumstances and whether you are likely

to put yourself into those circumstances. You see, Laura Winright, palmistry isn't just a slick trick. It's hard work, if you practice it honestly. Then, it has its limitations."

She smiled.

"Some day you must see my collection of palms. I have hundreds of them at the Barracks. You know, four of us nurses room together and we've christened the place the Barracks in honour of our quarters at the hospital where we were novices. Palmistry's quite fascinating. I picked it up when I was training at the hospital. First, I practiced with the girls, and then with the patients —it helped to while away the dull hours when I was on special with a convalescent. Then I started collecting hand prints around town. I've every prominent man on my list—"

"Including dad?"

"Yes, dear. I even bearded the lion in his den. He was quite pleasant. I have your brother's print. I'd have taken yours too, but you had just left for England. I'll take it when you're a bit stronger. A little lamp-black will make your hand quite legible."

Laura thrilled.

"Are criminals really identified by their hand-prints?"

"It's gospel. Sir Francis Galton in England reduced it to a science. He claimed that the chance of the finger-prints of two individuals being identical was less than one in sixty-four billions. The finger-prints alone, mind you —the mere tips. In South Africa the Kaffirs in the mines are identified by their finger-prints. The Chinese have used thumb-print signatures in banking for centuries. In the Farrow murder case at Deptford—I'm jumping from China to England—the Strattons were identified

and convicted by their finger-prints on a cash box. There are scores and scores of cases—"

Mentally, Laura Winright groped her way to the light.

"Could you read a hand-print just as well as the hand itself?" Her tone was animated.

"Not quite so well. The nails and the back of the hand help in reading, and the print doesn't show them. The little lines of the palm modify the main lines, and often make all the difference in the world, and a print can't always show them, either. Still"—her brow wrinkled—"with a hand-print one can at least try."

Laura's mind leapt back to the night of her home-coming. Convulsively she struggled up in bed. The nurse caught her.

"Don't, dear. You must lie down."

The patient surrendered.

"I don't need to sit up," she whispered. "But I can. And—soon, I must."

"Did you want anything, dear?"

Laura recollected herself.

"Yes. Please go to that clothes closet"—she indicated a corner of the room. "I think you'll find a pink kimono. Feel in the pocket."

The nurse obeyed without comment. Laura heard with relief the distant crackling of paper.

The nurse, returning, drew away.

"No—I'm not asleep." Laura opened her eyes. "You have it—a telegram. That's good. I was afraid it might be lost. Tell me, Miss Adair"—her tone grew appealing —"tell me about that man. The man whose hand-print is there—on that telegram."

Miss Adair sat down again. She gazed at Laura Winright oddly, as though fearing her palm-reading had carried her too far. Then she turned the telegram over. The message read:

Albany, N. Y., May 25, 1915.

Adam Winright,
Maitland Port, Ontario.

Arrived early Wednesday morning. Coming right through to Maitland Port.

Laura.

That telegram Laura Winright had despatched from Albany the morning of the day Adam Winright died. So much was obvious.

Miss Adair turned over the yellow paper. On the back was a black smear that, closely regarded, defined itself as the broken impress where some grimy hand had clutched the paper. Laura watched the nurse's face, expectantly.

"Man's hand—young—not over thirty-five—good—and bad—a singularly intricate mixture of good and bad. Most people are that, aren't they, Miss Winright? But here the good is very good, and the bad—well, it's uncommonly bad." She paused. "It's a pity the print is so incomplete, dear. Couldn't you get me a better one?"

"Surely you can tell me more!"

"I'll try." The fair brow puckered. "Ups and downs—vicissitudes—always trying—much travel—healthy—outdoor man, I should say—strong—self-reliant. You are disappointed, Laura Winright?"

Laura was disappointed. There was no shadow on this impressionistic picture Glory Adair conjured from the lines; a fighting soul battling against difficulties to the mastery—a strong, hardy, self-reliant man—such a man was close to her own ideal.

Glory's brows again puckered. She seemed to have more to say, yet hesitant to say it.

"I am inclined to think—I hope this won't offend—

that your friend finds a certain attraction in things criminal."

Laura's eyes gleamed.

"I'd like to meet him," pursued the nurse. "You'll introduce me, won't you?"

"I don't know who he is."

"Then why are you so interested?"

"Tap! Tap!" sounded softly on the door; but both minds shut out the sound.

"Why?" repeated the nurse.

Said Laura:

"Because I want to find this man."

The door opened. Tom Winright came in. He bowed magnificently to the brown-eyed nurse, and nodded cheerily to Laura. He was a strong, upstanding, resolute young man with steel-grey eyes.

"Pardon me, sister mine, but—I merely dropped in to enquire—not an intentional eavesdropper, Miss Adair—but—I couldn't help overhearing a little, and—*who is this man?*"

Laura disregarded Glory Adair's warning glance.

"Tom—Tom—see this!" She held the yellow sheet toward her brother. "There was a man in the Ghost Room that night, with my father. Tom, he killed my father. See. This is the print of his hand."

CHAPTER IV

THE MAN IN GREY

Tom Winright's glance questioned the nurse.

"Delirious?" he whispered.

Glory Adair felt her patient's wrist.

"Pulse good! Not a trace of fever." She smiled on Laura, too shrewd to attempt to hold in this pent up volcano of feeling. "You won't fret yourself, dear. Just tell us, quietly, all about it."

So Laura, with occasional pauses, told them.

"I must have walked in my sleep that night," she insisted.

She recollected nothing till she found herself in the Ghost Room, dressed in the pink kimono. There on the library table lay the telegram with its black smear. She had heard voices in the living-room, the voices of Annisford and Chalmers.

"I couldn't help listening," she protested. "I heard him—the doctor—say that father had not been ill. Everybody that day had told me the same thing—father had never mentioned being ill. Then there was that telephone message father sent the doctor just before he died—do you remember it, Tom? Did George tell you it?"

Tom slowly repeated:

"Chalmers, this is Adam Winright. I am dying. Please come at once. I must live till Laura comes. I have a message for her."

Laura shivered. She was living again what followed.

Glory Adair gripped her hand encouragingly. She would save her patient the telling.

"This is what you thought, Laura Winright? That hand-print was made by a man who held the telegram after the envelope was opened?"

"Yes, yes."

"You see, the telegram would be delivered to Mr. Winright, himself, in a sealed envelope. He must sign for it before breaking the seal. He would have it with him in the library. If that hand-print were not your father's, it must be the print of another man's hand; and that other man would be with your father when he died—"

"Yes, and would know how he died?" cried Laura. "And it was not my father's hand-print. That was why they found me in the parlour. I had to find out the truth at once, that very night. I could not wait till morning. That hand-print was not my father's."

She sank back, panting.

"Tom! Where are you going?"

Tom turned, magnificently deliberate. As ever, he did the right thing in the right way.

"I am going to telegraph at once for a private detective. Sister, I can't believe this! Poor old dad! But, if there's such a man on earth as you say, I'll hunt him down. For a case like this," he went on, practically, "the ordinary police are useless. They haven't the time. They haven't the skill. And we don't want publicity." To admiring Laura, his quick mind seemed instantly to grasp every detail of the situation. "I'll send for Harry Burnville. He's the very man we want."

He went out.

"I'm sorry!" whispered the nurse.

Laura's blue eyes questioned her.

"How can I help you, now? But surely, you don't believe it, anyway!"

"I do."

"How could he be murdered? Not a sign of violence, not a wound, not even a scratch—"

"I know." Yet Laura Winright's tone was stubborn. "Oh, yes, now I remember, there was a scratch—just there—on his hand—see!" She held up her own hand, indicating betwixt the first and second fingers. "I saw it."

Glory Adair shrugged her shoulders.

"Sh! Sh!" she soothed.

Tom Winright was back inside half an hour.

"I used the long distance 'phone," he said. "It's quicker. Burnville has another case on, but he'll be here Saturday morning, or maybe Friday night. We're losing very little time."

His manner was impressively self-congratulatory.

A thought came to Laura.

"There must be no—no publicity?"

"None whatever. Even Annisford won't know Burnville's real business. You see, sister mine, poor dad doesn't seem to have left any will. He never mentioned one, but I always presumed that—as a practical business man, you know—he had made one. After a casual look the morning after he died, Annisford and I locked the library till we could make a thorough search. It has stayed locked ever since. We were waiting for you to get better. Now"—wisely—"Mr. Harry Burnville is ostensibly a lawyer's clerk, representing Airth & Kinzie, attorneys, of Detroit, sent down here to make a proper search for the will, and, if there isn't any, to draft the necessary papers."

He lifted his eye-brows wisely. Laura realized that it was for such a man as Tom Winright to wrestle with these problems, and not for her, an impetuous, inexperienced girl.

"You think of everything, Tom!" she exclaimed.

After Tom had gone, Glory Adair glanced up, musingly.

"Saturday, or, maybe, Friday. This is Wednesday. This Burnville has a smart record as a private detective. He did some fine work in the Morand murder case. There were a couple of jewel robberies that he cleared up, too, very neatly. He's not a fool, even if he is a detective."

Doctor Chalmers on Thursday morning pronounced Laura much better.

"You look as though you were taking a new interest in life, Miss Winright," he jested. "You can get up today."

When the doctor had gone, Laura for the first time noticed a change in the nurse's manner.

Miss Adair grew restless. She fingered the telegram nervously. More than once she shot curious glances at her patient.

"I'm going down town," she burst forth, suddenly. "Mamma Judy can look after you."

And she was gone like a shot.

Mrs. MacTurk took Glory's place at the bedside. "I'm quite well," protested Laura Winright. "I can look after myself. I don't need waiting on." But Judith MacTurk settled herself down, none the less.

She was a tall, straight Scotchwoman with an old, gnarled face. In the earlier Maitland Port days, the population of the little lake town was all Scotch; and Judith MacTurk was then of the Scotch Scotchy. When she came with her husband, Angus, to take charge of Castle Sunset, she was past forty, now she was in the sixties, and old Angus was dead these many years. Her gnarled face was kindly; her Scotch burr had smoothed

a bit; she was a second—nay, an only—mother to Laura Winright.

"Sitting there, you make me think of old times, Mamma Judy," said Laura. "I—I feel just like a little girl—yes, a tiny baby—"

The old woman dabbed a fistful of blue apron into one eye.

"Nae ye mind," she urged, kindly. "Cheer up, and I'll tell ye a ghost story."

Laura smiled. These ghost stories were olden diversions. She had shivered at them once. Now, she enjoyed them. She lay listening intently to stories she had heard thousands of times before, told in the rasping Scotch voice that the years had made lovely to her.

"But, Mamma Judy," she argued, gently, "Miss Adair says there's no such thing as a ghost."

"That nursie body!" Judith MacTurk rose in affronted dignity. "Which shows she nae kens muckle—beggin' her pardon, but young folk aye rush in where angels fear to tread. Ghosts! Ghosts! Me name's Judith MacTurk." Her tone breathed defiance. "Be there a ghost in a' the country Judith MacTurk doesna ken? Belike I never told ye, Laura lassie, o' auld Jim Bailey's ghost what haunts ower Saltford way, which he hanged himsel' when his wife ran awa' wi' anither man, an' noo he's waitin' till she cooms back, an' then he'll creep up behind her in the dark an' put his icy fingers aboot her neck an' juist squeeze an' squeeze an' squeeze—"

A plaintive squeal came from the shadowy recesses beyond the door. Laura started.

"Oh, ye ninny!" scorned Judith MacTurk. "What ghost wad bother his empty skull wi' a soft mushmelon of a girl like ye, Katie Sparrow, wha forgets her work tae snoop aroond corners? An' Laura, lass, there do be

an Indian ghost up tae the Black Hole what's been kickin' oop dog there for thousands o' years. Many says there's nae sic ghost, but Judith MacTurk kens him wi' her own eyes. An' in the auld mill back o' Dungannon there's a tall ghost wha' gropes aboot the mill at midnight a' wrappit in blue flame. Oh, Judith MacTurk kens a' these ghosts an' mair—there's nae a ghost in a' the country Judith MacTurk doesna ken, an' that doesna ken Judith MacTurk. Now, be ye gane, Katie Sparrow."

Katie Sparrow shivered, but stayed. Laura Winright smiled. For her, all this spectral rigmarole was an oft-repeated story. Glory Adair, were she here, would not like it; Glory Adair would send Mrs. MacTurk scuttling back to the basement with ears tingling. But Glory Adair was not here; and Judith MacTurk was, and in most reminiscent mood.

"It wasna trouble killed your puir father." Mamma Judy's tone died to a whisper. "It was the ghost."

Laura stiffened into attention. She caught a new, strange note in the ancient rigmarole. This, too, Glory would have vetoed.

"What do you mean? Tell me, Mamma Judy—tell me, quick!"

"Sh! Listen ye. Many's the time Judith MacTurk, being upstairs, has heard below folk movin' aboot—the sort o' folk ye can see through, an' that passes through locked doors—"

Laura, shivering, hungered for more.

At any moment Glory might return, might interrupt before she could learn all the old woman had to say. Glory thought her suspicions a delusion, to be entertained but not believed, like any other delusion of a sick girl; and Glory would not allow this to go on. To Laura, it was no longer a hieroglyphic of ghosts that Mrs. MacTurk spread out. Did her father, she mused, have an

evening visitor who came often and stayed late? Was that why, through so many years, he had so often shut himself apart in the library and at times forbidden his own children to interrupt him there?

"Oh, but, Mamma Judy," she urged, "old houses at night are often full of just such noises. Castle Sunset was always that way. I was young and slept through it all."

"Nae, nae, lass." Judith MacTurk's mournful tone sounded a dirge for ghost-hunting opportunities that Laura Winright had lost. "It wasna always that way. Which Judith MacTurk, when she first came, thought, 'Tis the fine hoose for a ghost tae haunt'—an' many's the time at midnight Judith MacTurk went hunting for ghosts upstairs an' doon. Yet never she saw nor heard ane till Mr. Winright came home to stay—just when ye went awa, Laura, lass. Then she, Judith MacTurk, did hear it. It wasna like anyone walkin'—not a step, not Mr. Winright's step. It was more a shufflin', draggin', crawlin'. Which Judith MacTurk askit him of it. 'It's a tonic ye need, Judith,' says he. 'I'll have Chalmers put ye oop one.' Tonic!" The gnarled face widened in a beaming smile. "From that hour life was livin' for Judith MacTurk. Nae need o' tonic when she had a ghost i' the hoose wi' her, even though she never set eyes on him, but juist heard him draggin' aboot."

"Go on, Mamma Judy!" urged Laura, breathless.

The old woman's chatter terrified her, yet she must know. And every moment Glory Adair might return. Laura saw, not the fringe of cedars and the blue sky beyond her window, but the queer, lonely past that had peopled that old Ghost Room with affrighting shadows. "That was after I went away? And then?"

"They say there's nae will. Ah, but there was. An' Judith MacTurk's name is signed to it, an' Katie

Sparrow's, too, as witness. Katie Sparrow! Katie Sparrow! Coom forth." The trembling, fascinated maid obeyed. "Werena we a-sittin' doonstairs ae nicht? Didna ye hear a draggin' an' crawlin' in the room juist ben? Didna Judith MacTurk tell ye, there was the ghost again? Didna ye hear steps, coomin' doon the basement stair? Didna the very door open beside ye—?"

Katie, shivering, buried her face in the coverlet of Laura's bed.

"In cooms puir Maister Winright. He holds oot a paper. 'Will ye witness this, Judith, an' ye, Katie?' says he. 'It's me will.' An' he signed an' we baith signed, an' ye a-shiverin' a' the time so ye could scarce write."

Laura heard or fancied a step outside. The old woman held up a gnarled forefinger.

"That nursie body says there's nae sic thing as a ghost, Laura, lass? But if there's nae ghost i' the hoose, wha tookit the will? The last word's spoke."

The door opened.

In came Glory Adair, frowning.

"Oh! The last word's spoke, is it? Laura will feel relieved, I'm sure." Anxiously she felt her patient's pulse. "How in Heaven's name Laura stood your rubbish I don't know. Go away—I'll look after her. And I'll never trust you with her again."

"I—I enjoyed it," protested Laura Winright. "Why did you interrupt us?"

Mamma Judy stamped defiantly downstairs. Glory Adair sat down in the rocker, gazing at Laura all the while as though asking herself a question. She took the patient's hand in hers and studied the lines. That, Laura knew, was also a question.

"It can't hurt you," she announced with decision. "There's only one thing can hurt you, and that is holding you back. You're determined to go ahead. It's written

in your hand." Within her, nurse and palmist battled for supremacy.

She sat silent.

"What is it?" demanded Laura. "You found out something?"

"I did. This telegram was received at Maitland Port at 9.02 a. m. on the 25th. From Albany to Maitland Port it made fair time—"

"I sent it after eight a. m."

"Inside of twenty minutes more—at 9.18, according to the messenger's book—it was delivered at Castle Sunset. Still good time, you see?"

"Yes?"

"At seven in the evening," pursued the nurse, "Katie met your father going to the library, and asked if he'd heard from you lately, and he said he hadn't received word for a week or more. At 8 o'clock when your father telephoned the chauffeur, he said he *had just received a telegram.*" She dwelt on the words. "If he had just received that telegram at 8 o'clock at night, who received it nearly twelve hours before?"

"There was a signature in the messenger's book?" Laura's tone was excited.

"Sh!" The nurse held her own voice to a whisper. "The signature is 'Adam Winright.' It's a fairly good forgery. I catechized the messenger. He did not know Mr. Winright very well—"

"Father was rather a recluse.'

"Rather! The boy described the man who signed for the telegram. Tall, rather shabby, in a grey suit and with a soft grey hat. And—yes—a grey beard."

"Father's beard was black! And he was never shabby!"

Glory sat silent.

"Is that all?" Laura was quite composed now.

"I thought perhaps the print might have been made before the telegram left the office. Perhaps the blank was smeared before the message was written? I suggested that. It seems, though, the blanks are padded, and this was from the top of a fresh pad, and there was no substance within reach to cause such a smear. More, the clerk would not have used a dirty blank. There was nothing in the telegraph office, either, to cause the pin-pricks."

"What pin-pricks?"

Glory Adair handed her the telegram. Laura saw a couple of tiny punctures that went clear through the yellow paper.

The two young women gazed at one another.

Laura felt that the nurse had caught the wireless message of her thoughts. Her mind went straying persistently to the locked Ghost Room, standing now just as it stood that night.

"The Ghost Room is still locked?"

Glory answered nothing.

"I can walk—can't I?"

Eagerness, half-veiled, lit the brown eyes.

"We might find something—"

Laura's suggestion trailed into silence, but she pulled herself to her elbow.

"Bring me the kimono, please."

She was not waiting for Harry Burnville to investigate. Glory Adair deliberated a moment. Then, with a gesture of mock resignation, she crossed to the clothes closet.

"If Doctor Chalmers finds this out, he'll let me go," she said. "My professional reputation will be ruined. I'll never get another case."

"He won't find out."

They descended the dark stair, and turned down the

hall to the west wing, and the library door. Laura tried it.

"It's locked!"

Glory Adair produced a key.

"The room will be just as it was," she commented. "And—"

Laura inserted the key in the lock.

CHAPTER V

THE SOURCE OF THE SMEAR

That same mid-afternoon, Tom Winright received a telephone message. He went immediately in search of the chauffeur, Nick Ross. The chauffeur was nowhere to be found. Ultimately Tom took the car out himself, and drove direct to the leading hotel, where he enquired for Mr. Harry Burnville.

The bell-boy escorted him to Mr. Burnville's room, overlooking the Square. He found Mr. Burnville engaged in an elaborate brushing up.

"I beat the schedule more than a day, Winright. Managed to clean up that other case on the double-quick. I'll be with you in ten seconds."

He was of medium height, strongly built and dark. His clothes were natty and up-to-the-minute; his manner was quick and decisive. His gold-rimmed glasses and alert air belied the professional detective. He seemed rather a shrewd lawyer or a wide-awake metropolitan reporter.

Tom regarded him apologetically.

"I'm sorry to bring you here on a wild-goose chase, Burnville."

"Eh? Then I'm not to have a run for your money?"

Having eliminated the dust and grime of his railroad journey to the least infinitesimal speck, the detective proceeded to brush his curly hair to the exact line of parting. So doing, he asked questions.

"So this is all supposition, based upon a belated telegram and an accidental hand-print?"

Tom smiled.

"And nerves."

"Your sister's nerves?"

Tom Winright nodded.

"Just home from England, you know, Burnville. All the strain of war-time there, and then running the U-boat gauntlet, and then—then this shock. My father and Laura were immensely fond of one another. She was the baby, you know. I'd like you to come down right after dinner—"

"Why not now?" Burnville's manner was brisk. "A scent's never warmer for waiting. Just a minute, Tom." He spoke with the familiarity of close acquaintance. "A line on your household, please? Your mother—"

"Died when Laura was a baby."

"Who keeps house?"

"Mrs. MacTurk. You've heard Annisford refer to Turkey Bird? She's it. We call her Mamma Judy."

"A Scotch widow of uncertain age?"

"And believes religiously in ghosts. Her favourite diversion is terrifying little Katie Sparrow, the maid."

"Katie Sparrow, eh? Both Maitland Port folks?"

Tom assented.

"You spend very little time in Maitland Port?"

"Precious little. I prefer Woodward Avenue to The Square. Besides, there's the store."

Burnville discarded a collar and cuffs that to a casual eye presented no hint of soiling, and dived into the depths of his suit-case.

"Anyone else in the household?"

"Since Laura's illness, we've had a graduate nurse in attendance—a Miss Adair."

"Maitland Port girl?"

Another nod.

"Ever with you in Mr. Winright's time?"

"No."

Burnville carefully adjusted his tie, and scrutinized his shiny linen.

"Then this Miss Adair—does not signify?"

"No."

The detective gave the tips of his black moustache a twirl, and studied the effect in the mirror.

"Very well." He turned to the door. "Do it now, Tom—that's the word. By the way"—as, glancing through the lobby window, he noticed the car—"any charioteer?"

"Yes—drat his hide!" Tom Winright warmed. "I can never locate the fellow when I want him. His name's Nick Ross, and he rooms over the garage and is always pottering about with some sort of invention."

"Um!" Burnville took his seat. "You needn't break the speed laws to oblige me."

"There's no hurry!" Tom's tone was biting. "You'll discover just as much a year from now as you will this afternoon—which is nothing. But, remember"—his cynical irritation vanished in a flash—"no matter what I think of the case, I want you to probe it to the bottom. If there is a crime—which I can't believe—I want it brought to light. Just because your employer has his own private opinions, Burnville, is no reason why you should let your enquiry grow perfunctory."

"Trust me!"

Burnville whipped out his note-book.

"I must see this doctor—Chalmers, did you say?"

"I'll stop there, if you like."

"Do."

The call upon Doctor Chalmers consumed ten minutes. In Chalmers' eyes Burnville was just what Tom repre-

sented him, an attorney's clerk from Detroit, come to Maitland Port to search formally for the will. Of a will, Chalmers knew nothing, though he was one of Winright's few intimates in the town. He firmly adhered to his diagnosis of the case. Burnville carefully avoided any questioning that might lead to talk about town. In Chalmers' eyes, however, there was nothing to indicate foul play, or accident, or anything except the palpable agency, heart failure.

"Nothing there," commented Burnville, as he resumed his seat. "Tom, I believe you're right. Your sister has this telegram?"

Tom nodded.

A few minutes later the car was at Castle Sunset.

"We will go straight to the library?" suggested Burnville. "You have no objections?"

"None."

Tom led the way down the shadowy hall.

"You will find everything as it was that night," he explained, "or rather, the morning after. I took a casual look through the room next morning. Then Annisford came down, and we agreed to lock everything, and locked the room has stayed ever since. I—"

He checked himself. The Ghost Room door stood wide open. From within came a murmur of voices. The detective frowned. Tom pushed into the room.

"Laura!" His tone was urbanely reproachful. He frowned impressively on Miss Adair.

Laura Winright, ensconced in her father's armchair, tried nervously to hide her slippered feet. The nurse stood studying the ashes in the grate. She turned, very deliberately, her brown eyes seeking the black-moustached detective in the background.

"Mr. Burnville, I'm sure?" she purred.

Tom frigidly introduced them.

"Of Detroit?" Miss Adair smiled brightly. "The same Harry Burnville who cleared up the Hazlett jewel robbery so neatly? And that was splendid work, too, in the Morand murder case! Say, I'm immensely pleased."

Burnville returned a bland smile, his annoyance quite disarmed.

"I am surprised, Miss Adair, that my rather meagre fame has penetrated to a spot so remote—if I may call Maitland Port remote—?"

"Suit yourself, sir."

He nodded. "Just a minute, please," he added, to Tom. And, rapidly, with eyes alert, he moved up and down the room, halting at last before a black box wired in the corner. It looked somewhat like a telephone instrument, only that the black mouthpiece was surrounded by a circle of tiny lenses.

"This chauffeur dabbles in inventions, Winright?"

"So I understand," returned Tom, frigidly. "I'm not at all intimate with the fellow."

Burnville drew a chair up to the table, and, sitting down, slapped open his note-book.

"Miss Winright understands why I am here?"

"Completely."

"Very well. Miss Winright, if you feel equal to the strain, will you kindly tell me—?"

He bowed.

Laura summoned her reserves of courage. In a low, clear voice she told Burnville of her home-coming, the events that followed, the finding of the telegram.

"And your theory?"

She handed him the smeared yellow paper.

"That man was in the Ghost Room—this room—with my father."

There was a long silence. The detective made no comment; merely nodded to Laura to proceed.

The girl went into further details—the receipt of the telegram by the grey-bearded man, its belated delivery to Adam Winright, his singular telephone message to Doctor Chalmers. Then, to Burnville's questions, she indicated where her father had sat, where Annisford had stood; and re-enacted as far as she could remember the scene in the Ghost Room.

Burnville's face grew hard.

"He sat at the table. Now, tell me, was there any sign of disturbance—of violence—anything broken or disarranged?"

"I was too excited, too shocked, to notice much," faltered Laura. "George—Mr. Annisford—did not turn on the light at once. No—I don't remember anything—no sign of violence, I mean."

"Mr. Annisford agrees that there was none," commented Burnville. "And Doctor Chalmers confirms that. The appearances, so far as we have gone, render it improbable that any crime took place. Remember, Miss Winright, I do not prejudge the case. But, as facts now stand, we have the doctor's diagnosis of heart failure—the absence of any wound, or sign of violence—and the absence, furthermore, of any motive in the breast of anyone."

Laura's face grew white. She felt that this man, an expert in such matters, was tacitly pleading with her to give up her futile quest. Her lips quivered. Then tears came in reaction from the keen suspense.

"And that man?" Her tone was despairingly insistent.

Burnville studied the telegram. He stared at it with fascinated gaze. Thrice his lips parted, yet silently.

With a finger-tip he mechanically traced letters on the yellow sheet, as men do when their minds are engrossed.

"That man?" insisted Laura. "That man in grey who received this telegram from the messenger—that man who afterward was in the Ghost Room with my father?"

"You believe they are the same man?"

Laura nodded. Burnville's tense face relaxed.

"A man might secure the telegram and open it and again seal it, yet have no designs of violence. We have not the envelope—"

"We have its ashes, in the fire-place," crisply interpolated Glory.

Burnville eyed her a moment.

"Presumably, Miss Winright," he went on, "a man who would resort to forgery to secure a message would have a compelling interest in that message? Who would be interested in this or any other of your father's telegrams?"

"No one," answered Laura. Tom echoed her.

Burnville pondered. Laura watched him keenly.

"You are asking, 'Why doesn't this man come forward and tell what he knows?' "

"That is precisely what I am asking, Mr. Burnville."

"Might it not be the case that he has nothing to tell; that is, nothing concerning Mr. Winright's death?" He paused. "Or, the hand-print may have been made at the telegraph office—"

"No," flashed the nurse.

"You are sure?" Burnville smiled quizzically.

"I give you that much benefit of my independent enquiries."

Burnville turned to Laura.

"I attach very little importance to the hand-print," was his surprising comment.

Glory Adair intervened.

"To more than one man, a hand-print has meant hanging."

"But not in this instance."

"Perhaps not."

Laura fretted at this by-play. It was not to give Harry Burnville and Glory Adair a chance to argue that the detective had been summoned from Detroit. Her dominating idea was to hasten the enquiry to a solution.

Burnville turned to her.

"If there were murder, which I doubt, the means employed must be subtle—unnoticeable. And taking effect rapidly. That means poison in some form. After receiving the telegram, your father telephoned the chauffeur. Within ten minutes he telephoned Doctor Chalmers, stating that he was dying. Whatever occurred to cause his death occurred after the first telephone message and before the second."

Laura shuddered.

"In other words, occurred after the message had been delivered and probably after the man who delivered it had left. That's why I attach no importance to the telegram. Whatever happened, happened very quickly, in less than ten minutes."

"That stands to reason," commented Tom Winright.

"The hand-print is not Mr. Winright's?"

"No," answered Laura, doggedly. "I—I know."

Once more, in fancy, she knelt beside the white-draped bier and, dry-eyed, held her father's cold fingers in hers, painfully turning the dead hand toward the light.

"It might help to determine when the print came there?" suggested Glory. "When the envelope was first opened, or after it was opened by Mr. Winright? If the latter, then the substance from which the print was made must have been inside this room."

"Thank you." The detective eyed her with cool challenge.

"I would supplement, from my own observations of the hand-print," went on Miss Adair, "that this is not a man whose hands are normally dirty. The lines, where they show, are many and complicated, indicating refinement; the print, too, is dragged. The hand was wiped, you see; it didn't just clutch the paper. This man's first impulse is to wipe his hand; he snatches up the telegram Mr. Winright has just dropped, it being the first thing to come handy."

Burnville did not try to hide his impatience. He refused to attach importance to that hand-print. Now he merely nodded to what Glory Adair said.

"Quite right," he commented. "By the way, Tom"—he turned to young Winright—"had your father any other relatives? Or your mother?"

"Mother—no. And father had an only brother. Harold Winright. I don't know much about him," pursued Tom. "Dad never told me much. He seemed afraid of him—afraid—"

Laura, shifting in her chair, stared at Tom.

"Harold Winright was dead," she interposed, but without conviction.

"Dad told me that," agreed Tom. "Anyway, Harold never seemed more than a tradition. He died, it seemed, before we were born. Yet there was always that indefinable hint of some shadow in connection with him—some threat—menace—you understand, Burnville? I can't describe it, it's so absolutely indefinite."

"I understand. Now, what do you know of Harold Winright and his connections?"

"Nothing."

Laura nodded in agreement.

Burnville glanced up from his note-book. Glory Adair

had risen, and was moving softly up and down the room. She paused a moment before the fire-place.

The detective studied the hand-print. His eyes peered beyond it into the dim past from which loomed Harold Winright's shadowy, menacing figure.

"Mr. Burnville!"

The voice came from the far corner, where Glory Adair now knelt before the black box. The detective, rising, crossed to her side.

"See."

He saw her pointing finger, oddly slim and fine. Then his glance leapt admiringly to her challenging brown eyes.

"No—*that*," she insisted. "That's where the hand-print came from. That man was here with your father, Laura Winright."

Laura, shuddering, glanced about the room, as though behind the window curtains or in some dark recess of the book-shelves the mysterious man in grey might be hidden, waiting to pounce upon them. But Burnville's eyes followed the nurse's resolute index finger.

"There!"

From the corner of the black box oozed and fell to the floor an infinitesimal drop of brown oil.

CHAPTER VI

THE RECORD THAT VANISHED

Mr. Burnville regarded the black box.

"A house telephone system?"

"I suppose so," observed Tom Winright. "To be perfectly frank, Harry, this room has always been a mystery to me."

"I shall test the instrument." Seating himself, Burnville caught up the receiver. "Hello—hello! No Central to answer, eh? Is this new since you went to England, Miss Winright?"

Laura assented. Burnville, after two ineffectual attempts to elicit a response, rose and crossed to the French windows.

"A line of wires connects with the garage. Is that also new?" Another nod from Laura. "Two story brick garage; chauffeur's living rooms up-stairs. This telephone is to call him; but evidently he's not there."

"Undoubtedly!" Tom's tone suggested wrath deeply nursed.

"Does this system connect with the basement?"

"No. Why?"

"While we're waiting for the chauffeur, I'll interview the other servants."

Glory Adair pressed the push-button. She beamed on Mr. Burnville. His briskness appealed to her.

Katie Sparrow answered the summons. For ten lively minutes the detective quizzed her. She told of witnessing the will.

"When was that?"

Katie hesitated.

"Don't be afraid of me. I'm here to find the will."

"Christmas of last year it was, sir," admitted Katie.

Regarding Adam Winright's death, Katie had no first-hand knowledge, though, encouraged by Burnville, she retailed a great deal of what had come to her from Mrs. MacTurk.

"That will do," concluded Burnville. "Tell Mrs. MacTurk to—no, sit down. I may need you." Rising, he repeatedly pressed the push-button.

Mrs. MacTurk came, breathing gnarled anathemas on Katie for her evident failure to answer the first summons. She stayed to undergo Burnville's catechism. Katie's testimony she elaborated but did not contradict.

"This is called the Ghost Room? Why?"

"It is haunted."

"By a ghost?"

Mrs. MacTurk's look withered the black-moustached man.

"By what else, beggin' yer pardon? Think ye it would be haunted by a mushmelon?—or a clothes-reel?—or a potato masher?"

Burnville kept a straight face.

"Oh, you've seen this ghost? What did he look like?"

"Na, na, Judith MacTurk has heard him but hasna seen him—unless, belike"—in sudden illumination—"it was Maister Winright's double."

"Mr. Winright's double? Why not Mr. Winright himself, whom you took for a ghost?"

"Nae, mon. The ghost Judith MacTurk saw was a grey beard, an' Mr. Winright was a black beard. Ay, an' the ghost was dressed very shabby, an'—"

Burnville's face was intent.

"Describe him, please."

Judith MacTurk did so. Rather a tallish old man, with untrimmed grey beard, and wearing a shabby grey suit and a soft grey felt hat pulled down over his eyes. Grey, all grey, she insisted: and always shabby.

"Now, the manifestations of this ghost—?"

"Sir?"

"How often did you see him?"

For five minutes Mrs. MacTurk floundered in a bog of verbose narration. Burnville interposed.

"Quite often?"

"Very often, which, sir, I may tell ye—"

"Since when?"

"Since—oh, nigh a year. But there was a ghost years and years before that—oh, these many years. Which Judith MacTurk has heard him many's the night dragging his murdered corpse across this same floor while poor Mr. Winright sat here before the fire. Always it was dragging, dragging, dragging—"

Burnville snapped his finger.

"Stop! Miss Winright"—he turned to Laura—"you had better go outside. You can't stand this."

"I'll be all right," faltered the girl; and gripped Glory's hand, intent above all on staying.

Burnville did not argue. He went on questioning Judith MacTurk. Judith MacTurk had seen the grey ghost on foggy mornings or in the evening lurking about the lawn or slinking among the cedars.

"But never in the day time?"

Judith agreed.

"Did he ever enter the house?"

"Sir, he must have, if he stole Mr. Winright's will—"

"Did you see him in the house?"

"No, sir. But," pursued the old woman, hopefully, "he could come into this room through these windows"

—she indicated the French windows opening on the porch —"wi'out gaeing through the hoose, an' often the door was closed an' Judith MacTurk couldna see through oak like them funny rays—"

"In short, Judith MacTurk's eyes were not of X-ray capacity? When you came home that night, Miss Winright"—he turned to Laura—"were these windows open?"

"No."

The detective swung on Judith MacTurk.

"Did you see the grey-bearded man—the ghost—the day Mr. Winright died?"

Judith MacTurk stared.

"Judith MacTurk thought she kennt him amang the cedar trees"—she motioned, through the windows, toward the cliff edge.

"At what hour?"

Laura leaned forward, intent. Judith MacTurk's ghosts might, after all, be more than an old woman's fancy.

Judith MacTurk in answer to the detective drew from the bosom of her apron a greasy, dirty, black covered book with a pencil attached by a string. She slowly turned the pages, searching with peering gaze the crabbed writing, evidently her own. Burnville waited, patiently and long.

"What book is that?" he demanded at last.

"It's the book of the ghosts, sir," responded Judith MacTurk, earnestly. "Ah! Ah! Here 'tis, sir. May 25—9.20 a. m. See! See!" She was all excitement. "It's wrote down, there's no denying what's wrote by a witness. 'G. B. ghost, 9.20 a. m. along by cedars. J. T. went out toward him and he slippit up into the clouds.' "

"In other words, turned and ran?" The detective was skeptical. Yet he examined the book carefully. There

were two other books before that, Judith MacTurk gravely assured him. They were evidence, she asserted; evidence to prove that fou' nursie bodies an' other folk who ridiculed such things as ghosts knew not whereof they spoke.

"Now, Mrs. MacTurk," pursued the detective, "do you know any man in the neighbourhood answering that particular description?"

"There was auld Peter Dawson wha keppit doon by the tanyard, wha died three years gane—"

"Any living man?"

Judith MacTurk scorned him. "Livin' men be not ghosts. Nae, nae, Judith MacTurk kens nane." She knew no grey-bearded man in all Maitland Port that could be the same, if it were a man; and she was positive it was a spectre.

Burnville's further catechism elicited little. Mrs. MacTurk had never met Adam Winright till he bought Castle Sunset. She, and her husband, now dead, were Maitland Port folks. Adam Winright left the two children to her care and upbringing, temporarily according to their first arrangement but permanently as the result proved. Through their childhood he lived in Detroit, visiting the children but rarely; nor did they often go to Detroit. Two years before his death, Winright had given over the management of the business to George Annisford, and had made his home at Castle Sunset. But, almost simultaneously, Tom commenced to work at Detroit and Laura shortly afterward went abroad.

"You never heard the ghost except when Mr. Winright was in the Ghost Room?"

"Sir!" assented Judith MacTurk.

"And never saw him till after Mr. Winright came to live here?"

"Not the grey-bearded ghost, sir."

Burnville turned to the frightened maid with a reassuring smile.

"And did you see this man, Katie?"

"Yes, sir."

To Katie he was palpably a man, despite Mrs. MacTurk's controversial ghost book; a grey-bearded man who appeared only on foggy mornings or at eventide, and hovered in hazy distance, shrinking out of sight if any person approached. Katie's description fitted word for word with Judith MacTurk's. She had never spoken to this man, had never met him face to face; nor could she identify him with anyone.

"Though," she added, "there are plenty of sailors that come and go in the harbour, at the foot of the hill."

"A sailor," commented Burnville, "would hardly be so often in this one port."

He briskly dismissed both Katie and Mrs. MacTurk, and turned to the box in the corner; then, on afterthought, rose and with some difficulty shot open the rusty bolt that fastened the French windows. "These windows haven't been opened lately," he commented; but nevertheless examined the threshold closely. "Ladies and gentlemen," he added, "this man in grey seems to possess possibilities. Now, we shall surprise the chauffeur. Have you keys, Tom?"

Tom produced them.

The brick garage faced the side street; the double doors opening on the drive stood ajar as Tom had left them when he took out the car. In the cement-floored, bare-walled room was merely the usual equipment. At the rear a flight of wooden steps led to an upstairs door. Burnville, ascending, found this door locked.

He knocked.

There was no answer.

Burnville tried the key Tom proffered. The lock

yielded. The detective halted, his fingers on the door-knob.

"I have your authority?"

"Certainly," interposed Laura Winright.

Immediately after, ascending, she found herself beset by compunctions. The room was cosy. One end was curtained off; the part in which they stood, looking on one hand toward Castle Sunset, on the other toward Lake Huron, evidently served as a work-shop. Along one wall, just beneath the row of little windows, ran a long work-table, with machinery and tools in place. Art reproductions on the wall gave her a new conception of Nick Ross. Geraniums blossomed at one of the east windows. A pleasant, soft rug covered most of the roughly-boarded floor. The oil stove, though not in use, gave a hint of comfort. Laura drew back.

"Mr. Burnville!" she began.

But Burnville was stooping over a black box wired to the wall at one end of the work-table.

A heavy step sounded on the stair. Up came Nick Ross, jauntily, and surveyed the surprised group with a whimsical smile.

"Now, just get right out of here," he said, bluntly. "Depart! Vamoose! Spread your wings and flutter. A man's house is his castle, even if it's not quite a Castle Sunset. The afternoon's fine, friends. Go out and bathe in it."

Laura Winright stiffened with hostility toward this impudent young man with the peremptory tone and the cynical smile. She stood her ground, and looked into his grey eyes. Then he laughed, and doffed his hat.

"Miss Winright!" He brought forward the lone chair. "Accept my hospitality, such as it is, Miss Adair." He up-ended a packing box for the nurse. "Gentlemen, be seated. The floor is commodious and the work-table is

long. Yes, and the choice is free." He perched himself on the work-table. "Laura Winright, I'm delighted to see you."

"Impudent!" reflected Laura Winright; yet she found herself liking his sheer impudence. She felt the need of teaching him his place, and shrank from so doing, lest he suddenly become as other servants, purely servile.

Tom introduced Burnville.

"I am here in connection with the late Mr. Winright's will," explained the detective, crisply. "I have young Mr. Winright's full authority to question everybody."

"Got a note-book on you?" asked the imperturbable chauffeur. "Then get it out. I'm ready."

Burnville whipped out his note-book. He stood a moment, looking the chauffeur up and down. Nick Ross, seated and comparatively at ease, had his questioner at a disadvantage. Nick Ross saw it, and laughed.

"You want to watch me. Here, we'll change places," he volunteered; and leapt to the floor, where he stood throughout the questioning.

"Name?"

"Nick Ross."

"Nicholas?"

"Nicol."

"Oh! Chauffeur?" A nod. "How long employed here?"

"Two years this coming October."

"And before then—?"

"I worked in Detroit. I was working there when Mr. Winright asked me to take this place."

"Parents?"

"Dead." Nick Ross glanced at Laura Winright. "This is quite a catechism, isn't it?"

Laura stood amazed at his effrontery. Yet she sensed, even now, that it was not put on, but a natural, trustful

friendliness; a friendliness that thought it nothing out of place to address a superior after the manner of a bosom friend. Laura studied the chauffeur furtively. His eyes, she remembered, were grey. His tan suggested outdoor life. As he talked, he thrust his hands into his pockets. His tone was almost a drawl; it seemed slow and lazy in contrast with Burnville's staccato questioning.

"I'm a damned Yankee," he said, serenely. "Brought up in Connecticut; Uncle Jake Ross, a lawyer, had a little legacy in trust for me. I got through the public schools, and then vamoosed. Uncle Jake thought I'd make a smart lawyer, but I hadn't the patience: I'd rather put a car together than take an estate apart, and motor gas suited me better than the sort the down-east politicians run on. So Uncle Jake Ross gave me a few hundred dollars and sent me along to Detroit. 'If you can't get a job there, go to blazes,' he said. But I didn't need to do that, for I got a job as chauffeur with a Detroiter named Gates. One day Mr. Winright rode home with Gates from a directors' meeting. I noticed he kept looking pretty hard at me. When we let him down at Winright's, he said: 'Young man, if you ever want a job, here's the place to find me.' That was the first I ever saw him. A little later I got tinkering on my far-famed recording telephone."

Burnville glanced at the instrument, but said nothing.

"Mr. Gates didn't like the Far-Famed; thought it cut in on my work. I guess it did. I needed money, anyway, to buy stuff for my experiments. I went to Mr. Winright. He listened without a word for about half an hour. Then he said, 'Come to work on Monday at $150 a month.' I was with him a month in Detroit. Then he sent me up here."

"As chauffeur?"

"When he needed one. Mr. Winright rarely used the

car. I got into a way of regarding my time as my own."

Tom Winright glowered.

"This recording telephone?" pursued Burnville. "What is it?"

"It's the invention that's going to make my fortune," said Nick Ross, serenely. "It's going to revolutionize the moving picture industry. Instead of shipping films all over the country and putting them on to the accompaniment of any old tune, every local theatre will be wired to a big city producing plant. Click! Your show starts. The people move on the screen. They talk. They laugh. They howl. They cuss, if the censors will let 'em. What does it? Simplest thing in the world, Mr. Burnville. Electricity, carried over a wire."

"You have invented this?" questioned Burnville, sceptically.

"I've planned to invent it," gravely returned Nick Ross. "Planning is half the battle, you know."

Then he laughed, musically.

"What I have invented," he conceded, "is a telephone that will record a message at either end. That's a first step."

"Does it record the message perfectly?"

"I wouldn't say that."

Laura Winright smiled. This young man's impudence was delightfully colossal. She relished it. She liked him in this mood of cheerful cynicism. He jested so seriously; he laughed so at the serious side of his jest, the endless, harassing failure of his life.

"That's it." He indicated the black box. "That's the wonder of wonders; the Ross phonetescope, rising to report progress."

"That box contains a record?"

"No. It's empty as the pockets of Uncle Jake's client at the end of a lawsuit."

Again the soft, musical laugh. Nick Ross, glancing about as though in search of admiration, shot a quick, daring look at Laura's face. She turned away. Her eyes sought the red geraniums on the window sill. Between them stood a little easel, holding a photograph. For one uncomprehending moment she was oddly impressed with its familiarity. Involuntarily stooping, she studied it closely.

Then, with a deeper flush than before, she glanced furtively toward the chauffeur. Her eyes met Glory's.

"It's a very good photograph of you, Laura Winright," said the nurse.

Laura stared at the floor. Perplexed, resentful, she heard Burnville's continued questioning.

"This box connects with the one in Castle Sunset?"

"Yes. Mr. Winright used it to call me; and it helped my experiments."

"Is there a record in the other box—the one in the library?"

Nick Ross started. His habitual good-humour seemed for an instant shaken.

"Seek, and ye shall find," he at last observed. "Shall we?"

Burnville's brows lifted. Laura felt her heart beat faster. What message might her father not have left in those tragic ten minutes when he knew he was dying; the message he had wished to give her?

"We'll take a look," assented Burnville. "But first—show me how this thing works."

Ross, pressing a little lever, snapped open the black box. "The record goes on there," he explained. "You have to be careful taking it on and off, else it will scratch. While you talk, this needle beneath the mouth-

piece records what you say. It doesn't make a nickel's worth of difference whether it's worth recording. It's simple, if it could only be made to work every time." He snapped shut the box.

They crossed the lawn. Entering through the French windows, Nick Ross went straight to the corner, and there knelt. To Laura Winright, the mysterious black box with its wide-mouthed transmitter and circling lenses had become a thing of strange ill-omen.

"See these little lenses," said Ross. "They take in the sight, just as the transmitter does the sound. That is, they're *supposed* to take it in. Then the whole thing is shot onto the record and at the same time carried over the wire. Funny what things people will invent, isn't it?" This time his eyes sought Miss Adair's. "I could load you with technical explanations—truck-loads of 'em—but what's the use if you don't understand? And if you did understand, being smarter than I am, you'd go ahead and invent the thing first, and I'd have all my work for nothing. Friends, this invention is a long, long way to Tipperary, I assure you." So speaking, he found and pressed the lever and the black box snapped open.

Laura, expectant, drew close.

"Empty!" ejaculated Nick Ross. "Now, where did Mr. Winright put that record?"

"Why Mr. Winright?" flashed Burnville.

"No one else ever touched the machine." Rising, the young man went whistling about the room. His auditors were all intent, and most of all Laura Winright; intent on the message that, she felt sure, her father must in his dying hour have left recorded on the wax cylinder.

Nick Ross stared into the fire-place, his hands deep in his pockets.

"Now, where in—?"

He dropped to his knees, and with his fingers raked the flaky ashes. Then he laughed.

"Here endeth!" He held up a tiny bit of wax. "Smashed to smithereens—melted to molasses. That's what happened to our record. But I've got more in my work-shop—"

He turned to go.

"Sit down," commanded Burnville.

CHAPTER VII

THE LETTERS IN WINRIGHT'S DESK

Nick Ross did not obey. He stood beside his machine, looking Burnville up and down.

"Well, you are a cool one, giving peremptory orders to a free American. What do you want, anyway?"

Laura involuntarily contrasted the two men. The sun-tanned, smiling chauffeur was about of a size with Burnville, about of an age, though Burnville's moustache and Burnville's glasses and Burnville's shrewd professional look made him seem much the older.

"Sit down," said Burnville, again. "I'm here with full authority to question the servants."

"Cut out your servant talk, friend. I'm no servant. I'm a chauffeur, and I'd have you know that a chauffeur is lord and master."

"I would suggest," said Burnville, drily, "that you sit down and answer my questions."

Laura found herself inwardly resenting his tone; involuntarily siding with puzzled, perplexed Nick Ross. For the first time she appreciated that the young man knew nothing of their suspicions.

"Mr. Ross," she interposed. "To oblige me."

Ross laughed.

"It's a bargain, Miss Winright." He sat down, gazing across the corner of the table at Burnville. "Now, go to it."

Burnville had stayed bland throughout. Ross, evidently, had surprised him, but had not annoyed him. His

slightly mandatory tone was a habit, not a menace. He smiled, now, in a conciliatory way.

"It is possible that Mr. Winright's will was stolen—stolen the night he died. I want to find out, so far as you can tell me, just what happened that night."

The chauffeur's jaunty manner grew grave. Burnville pressed his questioning.

"Where were you that day, the 25th of May?"

"In Maitland Port. Most of the morning I worked on the recording telephone. I did not finish it that day." His smile came and went in a flash. "No, that was not The Day for me. After lunch—"

"Where did you lunch?"

"At the hotel near Harbour Park. It's handy, and not expensive. After lunch I went up the river. Yes, I admit walking. It's unprofessional, but a fellow likes to get away from his business, and it's a beautiful walk, and there were any amount of wild flowers to puzzle over and wonder how God invented them all. He'd have been ages and ages doing it if he weren't any smarter than I am."

Laura Winright glanced at him, shocked; and looked away again, awed by his manifest reverence.

"Now, Mr. Burnville, I most emphatically *did not* time myself. As near as I can guess, I perfected the recording telephone between seven a. m. and 1.10 p. m. I was late for lunch, I remember. Then I was out all afternoon, till five o'clock, and came back for dinner. Between six and eight I was at the garage, adding the finishing touches to the king pin of my fortunes, the Ross phonetescope. These hours are only guesses, of course."

"When did you see Mr. Winright?"

"Not at all. I telephoned at 1.10 asking if he'd need the car. He said, no."

"What else did you say?"

Ross seemed embarrassed, for once in his impudent young life.

"Well?" Burnville's tone was peremptory.

"Oh, I just asked if he'd heard from Laura lately."

Laura Winright flushed.

"Miss Winright, you mean?"

"I said, Laura." Having admitted the truth, Ross did not seek to further temporize. "He said he hadn't heard from her. That was all. Nothing very devilish about that, was there?"

Laura dodged the friendly smile he flung at her.

"And after that?"

"Nothing more to do with Mr. Winright till close to eight o'clock. Just a few minutes before eight, Mr. Burnville, I heard my recording telephone buzz. Mr. Winright told me—"

"One minute, please. Give me his exact words."

Ross shot a quick glance at the detective.

"He said, 'Is that you, Nick?' I told him, yes. Then he said, 'I have just received a telegram that Laura is coming home. She may be on the 8.05. Take the car to the station and meet her.' I said, 'Yes.' "

"Yes, sir?"

"No, Mr. Burnville. I did not say, 'sir.' "

Laura's delight in the chauffeur's impudence was shadowed by a hint of resentment.

"Then you took the car out and met the 8.05 train?"

"I was a few minutes late."

"Did you see Mr. Winright himself?"

"No."

Burnville tapped his pencil on the note-book. Laura sensed his wish to trap the chauffeur into some admission; that he felt the frank, impudent young man was perhaps holding something back.

Had Ross sensed the true significance of all this ques-

tioning, she wondered. Hardly. He knew nothing of their suspicions. To Laura's mind flashed the thought: "He may know more than he tells. He may be guilty." She shot a glance into his frank grey eyes; and the suspicion vanished.

He was not that sort of man.

In the same instant the chauffeur leaned forward.

"I left the garage at eight. The little clock upstairs was just striking. I glanced toward Castle Sunset. The library windows were dark. Outdoors it was just between light and darkness. As I turned the car into the street, I saw a young man come down the steps from the front door, and down the walk to the street."

Burnville's brows lifted sceptically.

"Can you describe this man?" Glory Adair broke the ensuing silence.

"No, Miss Adair. It was near dark. He walked quickly. I was in a hurry. I don't know which way he went."

"Yet you say he was young?"

"I judge by the way he walked."

Still Burnville tapped with his pencil. Laura fancied she read his thoughts. She put the idea from her, incredulously. This Nick Ross might be impudent, but—he was not *that* sort of man. Quite instinctively her soul rallied to his defence, even against suspicion. Yet there was that long morning he had spent alone in his work-room—that long afternoon explained by a story that could never be corroborated of a walk up the Maitland—and those two hours just before her father died, once more alone there—and there was now this suddenly conjured story, uncorroborated by anyone else, of a young man leaving Castle Sunset at the stroke of eight.

Only, Nick Ross was not that sort of man.

Burnville watched him in a deliberate silence that at last grew awkward.

"Did you see any other suspicious person?"

Ross meditated.

"N-no." He hesitated. "Yes, now I think of it, there was one man who might be called suspicious. I've seen him slinking along the hedge and through the grounds, always in foggy mornings or after dusk. He seemed an old man and dressed in grey, with a grey felt hat pulled down over his eyes. He looked rather—well, rather taggy."

"And had a black beard?"

"I think it was grey."

"Did you recognize him?"

"No. I hailed him once, and he scattered like a flock of sheep."

Burnville pushed back his note-book. He eyed the chauffeur, coldly; and Laura Winright felt her heart sink.

Then with a smile the detective put out his hand.

"I'm sorry to have kept you so long from the phonetescope."

Ross laughed.

"This afternoon isn't a patch on the age it will take to finish."

Burnville, rising, closed the French windows, shutting out the young man's cheery whistle as he crossed toward the garage.

"I intend to make a formal search for the will," he observed. "It is not with Airth & Kinzie at Detroit; and Greenwood, the only local lawyer who ever did business for Mr. Winright, knows nothing of any will. I find a trust deed at Detroit providing annuities for the two servants. Of course, as witnesses, they could not

receive any gift under the will. As there's no trace of a will at Detroit, it must be here."

He indicated particularly the old-fashioned walnut table in the centre of the room, a massive chunk of gloomy furniture. The corner drawers might hide missing papers. Burnville, however, did not immediately attack them. Rising, he glanced about the room. Three walls were lined with book-shelves reaching to the ceiling, with drawers for bases. With an air of attending first to non-essentials, the detective went through these drawers. They revealed a few old newspapers, neatly folded, and a few broken-backed or coverless books, carefully arranged and tied.

"Mr. Winright was very systematic," commented Glory Adair. "His hand told me that."

Burnville glanced at her.

"So you're a palmist?"

"Palmistry helps, sir."

Burnville rose, and dusted himself with a handkerchief.

"I'll look on top of the books," he said; and climbed on a chair to do so.

"You'll find nothing," the nurse advised him. "Mr. Winright would not dispose of an important document so carelessly. See how neatly those old papers were folded and those worn-out books arranged!"

"Palmistry again!" scoffed Burnville. "You're right, though." Having made the circuit of the shelves, he at last descended. "Will you unlock the drawers, Tom?"

The first drawer was empty. The next yielded a bundle of letters, carefully tied.

"Your letters, Miss Winright," said Burnville.

"Not worth reading."

"I surmise," put in Glory Adair, "that you find these letters arranged in the precise order in which they were received?"

Burnville glanced through them.

"Correct. Palmistry again?" he quizzed.

The third drawer contained receipted bills from local tradesmen. "These are arranged chronologically," volunteered Burnville, with just a hint of sarcasm. He turned to the fourth and last drawer. "And these are not. What do you make of that?" He pulled forth a jumble of loose papers.

Laura, watching, saw as he examined them a flash of comprehension leap into Burnville's dark eyes.

"Your father wrote you regularly while you were abroad, Miss Winright?"

Laura assented.

"Did his letters indicate disquiet—trouble—worry of any kind?"

"N-no. Except that he did not like me to be there in war-time. He never mentioned himself much till that last letter, which told me he was ill and wanted me to come home at once."

"That letter reached you early in May? Four weeks ago?"

Laura nodded.

"Did your father seem worried, Tom?"

Laura was puzzled. In those letters was something that had started Burnville on this new line of questioning. She resented his making a mystery of it.

"Dad kept his worries to himself," returned Tom, drily. "Come to think of it, though, he did seem a bit unlike his usual self—"

"When did you first notice that?"

"Last October, I should say."

"About the time he received this letter?"

He passed it across to Tom. Tom's habitual urbanity reeled. "I never dreamed this!" he exclaimed. "Laura, look here!"

Together they read the letter more closely. It was written with pencil, on a cheap quality of scribbling paper, in an almost illegible hand.

October 18.

You never expected I'd make trouble again but I dont think you done right by me the last divy. So, it's up to you to come acrost. I'm up agin it and desprate. There's got to be a fair divy, I tell you. I maybe cant afford to be seen, but you cant afford to shut the door agin me if I call. Look for me Tuesday night.

A. W.

"Oh!" gasped Laura, a new picture shaping for her of that last night in the Ghost Room.

"These letters"—Burnville glanced complacently at Glory Adair—"are *not* arranged in chronological order. The next I find is May 20. But here is one of December 1."

He read:

Its time for another instalment, old pal. I rely on a harty welcome. Tuesday night is my night, and be in the same place.

And dont try to thretten. Maybe I cant afford to have people know where I am, but neither can you afford to have people know *what you are*.

Dont try to put me off with a handful when I want a bucketful. Ive been patient as it is. If you want to get rid of me, do what's right. Thats a quicker way than threttening.

Webb.

"Who is Webb?" asked the detective. "Does the name suggest anything?" But both brother and sister looked

blank. Glory Adair watched satirically. If the detective was amused at her apparent discomfiture, she, for her part, found amusement in the detective.

"On February 8," pursued Burnville, "there is another letter."

I cant say you didnt treat me pretty handsome these last few calls; but Im down and out. After all, what have you got that aint mine just as much as its yours? Answer me that, old pal.

Divvy up, fifty-fifty, is the only fair word for it. Make up your mind to that. Youll never get rid of me till you split fair and square.

Tuesday night—and remember.

Handy Andy.

Again the detective glanced at Tom and Laura; and again the name struck no responsive chord in their memories. Laura was trying to reach back, mentally; to lay tight hold on it; to find somewhere in the dim distance of her early Maitland Port days a grim, menacing figure, a Handy Andy Webb. Yet she could not.

"Did you ever hear of such a man, Tom?" she whispered.

"Never, in God's world," gasped Tom. He wiped the perspiration from his forehead with a handkerchief. "This is all new to me. What's next, Harry?"

The next was a brief slip of paper, with the significant words:

Tuesday night—as usual.

"No date even for that one," commented Burnville.

Glory Adair sidled up to him.

"Mr. Burnville," she urged, insinuatingly, "I've just

thought of something. Mr. Winright had a very methodical nature. His hand tells me that. Doesn't it surprise you that he neglected to arrange these letters in their proper order?"

"Not at all," flashed Burnville. "When panic comes in at the door, human nature jumps out the window."

Laura clutched the nurse's arm.

The last letter was unsigned.

May 20.

Im coming again, Tuesday.

And see here, Adam Winright, this time theres got to be a settlement, full and complete. The wife's sick and Im poor, not because I oughtnt to be rich, but because of you. I wont stand no more monkey work. If you dont settle with me Ill settle with you or my names not Andrew Webster.

"Webb," commented Tom. "Handy Andy. Andrew Webster." He knitted his brows.

"Tuesday," said the detective, "was the 25th of May. That Tuesday morning was the last time this grey-bearded man was seen near Castle Sunset. That man is Andrew Webster. And Andrew Webster is the man I want."

"You'll get a warrant for him?" flashed Tom.

"Yes."

Laura protested.

"But the newspapers!" Her whole soul shrank from blatant publicity.

"I'll see to that," Burnville assured her. "The warrant will merely charge attempted blackmail. That's plenty to hold him—"

"If you find him," challenged Glory Adair.

The rivals faced one another.

"Just one suggestion," added the nurse. "He says he's a poor man. He uses cheap paper torn out of a school scribbler. If you were, as I've been, the child of a poor man, you'd know that the poor man's wife has her box of cheap stationery, and that the poor man uses his wife's paper and envelopes when he sits down to write a letter. This scribbling paper is just an attempt at disguise by a man who doesn't know the circumstances he's trying to imitate."

Her glance withered Burnville. He came back instantly in words at which Laura Winright stiffened.

"Oh. You mean this Andrew Webster is really Harold Winright—Harold Winright, who died years ago?"

Glory made no answer.

"I'll get him," concluded Burnville, coolly. "Then we'll find out."

CHAPTER VIII

THE RETURN OF ANNISFORD

Burnville, without delay, secured a warrant for the arrest of Andrew Webster on a charge of attempted blackmail.

"This, and the description I have, will be good enough to hold him. Once we get our man, we can find out the truth," he told Laura Winright.

She was conscious that throughout he had addressed himself to her, rather than to Tom. She sensed Tom's scepticism; she tragically felt that, even after the finding of the menacing letters, neither man really believed that there had been actual murder. They still held to Doctor Chalmers' diagnosis of heart failure.

"Our grey-bearded man will be travelling under some other name, that's certain," declared the detective. "But I'll get him. Meanwhile, keep one eye on that library."

"I'll keep the keys, too," announced Laura.

Their scepticism hurt. She was thoroughly self-convinced that there had been murder. That thought, too, had hurt in its time; but it had left her sternly intent on running the murderer to earth.

Burnville made enquiries at the two railroad stations. No man of the description given had been seen leaving town on or since the 25th of May.

"That's one advantage of a small place," commented Burnville to Miss Winright. "If anybody goes away, there's some one else not too busy to take notice and remember. Our man might have got by unnoticed, but

it's hardly likely. I've questioned bus drivers and hotel porters and everyone likely to see him."

Enquiry at the harbour speedily showed that the man, unless he was a sailor, had not left by one of the few freighters moving this early.

"He's in town yet," decided Burnville. "We may have him in a few days."

Then he went ahead with a thorough drag-netting of the town itself. Conducted quietly, unostentatiously, and practically single-handed, his enquiries took time. Sceptical Tom Winright at last tired of waiting.

"I'm going back to Detroit," he announced. "Annisford wants to get away and try out his new yacht. If anything turns up, wire me; and if you need money, remember there's two million back of you. Get up an affidavit regarding your search for the will, and send it to me. I'll have Airth & Kinzie get letters of administration for the estate. Dad must have burned that will after he made it."

Laura accompanied him to the train. He kissed her patronizingly.

"Sister mine," he said, very seriously, "Annisford is going to bring that new yacht here; and he's not coming here just to try out the yacht. He hasn't built it just because he likes to own the biggest yacht on the Lakes."

Standing like a statue, she watched the train go out. Mechanically she accepted the chauffeur's hand to help her into the car.

She knew what Tom meant.

Two years before, she had promised to marry George Annisford when she came back to America. His diamond on her finger was a perpetual, haunting reminder. Annisford had half-jestingly, half-seriously, suggested a honeymoon on the Lakes in the finest yacht that money could build.

Laura shivered. Two years ago, such a prospect had seemed far distant, and not unwelcome. Now, it was terribly near. She could not marry so soon. Of course it was impossible, with her father just dead . . . Prosaic Annisford, though, was not the man to take thought of such things. He would merely remember her girlish promise.

She must put him off. He must wait, till this search was finished. And then—

She still shivered.

Nick Ross half turned from the wheel.

"Are you cold, Miss Winright?"

He had noticed that shiver, in the mirror.

"Cold—on a warm day like this!" She tried to laugh. She sensed a change in his attitude toward her. Usually he had been boyishly impudent. Now he was solicitous.

At Castle Sunset, she told Glory Adair what Tom had said.

"Mr. Annisford is coming, maybe in a week—two weeks—in his yacht—"

Then, bit by bit, she told Glory all, and showed her the glittering ring.

"Do you love him?" asked Glory.

Then she abruptly changed the topic.

"Our detective is very thorough, and singularly persistent. He called just now. He's got track of his man on a grain boat coming down from the Soo." She smiled, admiringly. "Put Harry Burnville on a definite trail, and he'll never give up. The way he's combing this little old town is a caution. He fairly haunts the harbour."

From day to day, Burnville brought word of much work, persistent searching, but small achievement.

"You'll never find that man," protested Laura Winright, almost fretfully. The search was wearing on her.

"I've found him twice," returned Burnville. "In fact,

there's a report afloat that this particular man is entitled to a big legacy from Adam Winright, and that I'm the lawyer looking for him. I'm advertising, too." He showed a Montreal paper. "That story by now has travelled from the Soo to the St. Lawrence. Here's a despatch from a Detroit paper." He drew a clipping from his note-book. "If that man, Andrew Webster, is after money, he'll fall for this story. There's been no hue and cry of murder, no inquest, no hint of suspicion, nothing to put him on his guard. He'll walk right into the trap. It's a lot easier to find a missing legatee than a fugitive murderer. You can catch more flies with honey than with vinegar, you know."

Chuckling, he tucked away the clipping.

"I'll get him," he repeated, confidently.

"You said you'd found him twice?" questioned Laura. "You mean you got trace of him?"

"No. But I had two claimants for the legacy, both confident that they were Andrew Webster and could prove it. Half a dozen questions showed me they were absolute frauds."

Burnville's confidence was sheer habit; his speedy rallying from defeat was a part of his training. To Laura Winright, unused to such a quest, these ups and downs were harassing. The pursuit of Andrew Webster was for her not a mere item of the day's work, but a vendetta as sacred as any that ever existed in Sicily.

Each day's failure, as day swiftly followed day, meant a further opportunity of escape for her father's murderer.

The thought harassed her relentlessly.

With Glory Adair, she studied the smeary hand-print on the telegram till the cruel, deep line leading to the index finger was photographed on her soul. When she found a man with a deep-cut line on his hand leading to the

index finger, she would have the man she sought. And as Burnville went on with his fruitless search of the town and his vain enquiries among lake sailors who came and went, that thought drove itself into her mind: "I am the one to find him. I am the only one who can find him. In his very heart, Harry Burnville doesn't believe there's such a man. Tom doesn't believe it. But I know it. I am the one to find that man."

Yet she was weak and helpless. Burnville, to whom her feud meant nothing, could reach out across land and water in his quest for Andrew Webster. She was a woman. She could do nothing save sit still and fret.

"Glory!" she cried, impatiently, "there must be some way I can help. Won't you help me find it?"

"Lie down and have a sleep, dear," advised Glory, practically. "Then we'll talk it over."

When Laura woke it was late afternoon. A letter awaited her. She was about to open it when the telephone rang. The call was from Burnville, tersely decisive as all Burnville's messages were.

"I've got him, Miss Winright. He's at the Ocean House. Come right down in the car. Bring someone who can identify him. Oh, say, that chauffeur has seen him—he's the man to bring. If he isn't handy, bring Mrs. MacTurk."

Laura found Nick Ross at the garage. He dropped his work on the phonetescope with cheerful alacrity. In a moment more the car swept around the curve toward Harbour Hill.

Then Laura remembered her letter. It bore a Port Huron post-mark of the day before. The writing was Annisford's. She knew before she read the matter-of-fact message just what she would find there. The *Beatrice* was just leaving Port Huron. That meant that the *Beatrice* might reach Maitland Port at any moment.

The car descended the hill road. Laura glanced across the lake, past the fringe of dark elevators and straggly buildings that lined the wharves. There was no spot on the blue.

She sighed relief.

Anyway, the quest was ended. So far as that was concerned, she could marry Annisford now. Only—she crumpled the letter! He treated her love quite as a matter of fact—and her woman's heart craved something more.

They found Burnville in the sitting room of a weather-beaten frame hotel at the foot of the hill. Across a little table from him sat a squat man with an untrimmed grey beard. He was dressed in a sailor suit; his eyes, furtively keen, looked down as Laura Winright came in.

Burnville glanced at her. His glance was no longer confident, but perplexed and uncertain. In a dry, hard tone he introduced Miss Winright.

Then he sat down again. The grey-bearded man had not even risen at her coming.

"You say your real name is Andrew Webster?" questioned Burnville, a bit sharply.

The man gave him a dubious glance.

"See here, there ain't no catch to this thing, is there?"

"No. If you can prove you're the man, there's something coming to you. Winright and Webster were pretty thick years ago. It seems Mr. Winright owed him something. This legacy is intended to square the debt."

The man leaned close to Burnville.

"See here," he whispered, hoarsely, "I got into a little scrap at Buffalo. Nothing bad, you know, but the dicks might have faked up something on me. So I lit out—shipped on the *Superior King* for her first trip up, and I've been with her ever since. I signed as John Langton, but my real name's Andrew Webster. Nothing wicked in that, is there?" he concluded, defiantly.

Burnville smiled.

"A man's name is what he chooses to call himself," he philosophized. "The name won't affect the legacy. Now, where were you on the 25th of May?"

"On the *Superior King.*"

"In harbour here?"

The man hesitated. "Sure," he at last declared, glibly enough.

Laura's eyes were fixed on his face, a face brutish and rough. Burnville had been right when he sought only a poor man. Glory had been wrong when she declared the plea of poverty a mere disguise. . . . And this man was with her father that night—why? How had such a man ever by any chance come into Adam Winright's busy, austere life?

"In harbour here?" repeated Burnville.

"That's what I said, wasn't it?" The tone was not conciliatory.

"Now, think carefully. Where were you at 9.20 that morning?"

Again the man hesitated. Furtively he scrutinized Burnville. Nick Ross stepped forward from the background, and looked hard at the squat, grey-bearded man.

"Stand up," commanded Burnville.

The sailor shambled to his feet.

"Is this the man, Ross?"

Ross regarded him. The other refused to meet the chauffeur's gaze.

"The man I saw along the cedars?" Ross laughed. "This chap's as near like his twin brother as I am like the Angel Gabriel, Mr. Burnville. Why not look up the shipping lists? Then figure out how the *Superior King* could be in harbour here on the 25th of May and on the identical day pass through the Soo locks on her down trip."

Laura Winright rose, stiffly. Burnville leaned across the table.

"You're a fraud!" he said, tersely. "Get out!"

Laura Winright rode home in stricken silence. Once she turned in her seat as the car ascended the hill road, and glanced across the lake, fancying in the distance a white, gleaming hull and taper spars; breathing easier that her more careful search did not find them.

"Wait here with the car," she told Nick Ross; and went into the conservatory. There Glory Adair presently found her clipping a bouquet of white flowers.

"Well?" asked Glory.

"Just another fraud!" The girl's scissors went viciously snip! snip!

She went out to the car with her flowers.

"Drive to Maitland Cemetery," she commanded, in a hard voice.

The chauffeur glanced at her, manifestly alarmed by her tense, possessed mood.

The cemetery was a mile or more beyond town, and looked down upon the river. There came to them, distantly, the sound of the Maitland's thin stream splashing over rocks and stones, making music in a host of tiny waterfalls. To Laura, the sound was a dirge.

At the white gates, Ross helped her down.

"Wait here, Ross!" she commanded; and hurried along the winding paths and across the rustic bridge. In the distance a granite shaft and a mound of freshly turned earth marked the grave of Adam Winright.

Laura laid down the white flowers, and knelt a long time in silence. The only sounds that came to her were the swish of branches in the soft June breeze, and the distant dirge of the river.

The moments raced on, and still she knelt. She was telling herself things that she must never forget. What-

ever befell her, she wanted these things printed on her memory in letters of fire. She had loved her father.

She rose sharply, with hands uplifted to the blue sky.

"This task comes first," she breathed. "It is mine—not Harry Burnville's, not Glory Adair's, but *mine*." Her eyes shone, as though mirroring the sunshine; hers was the rapt look of the visionary.

Behind her a twig snapped. She glanced about, surprised, and found herself facing Nick Ross.

"Oh!"

"You were gone so long, Miss Winright," he explained. "I was afraid."

She looked again at the grave, and the white flowers, and the blue sky overhead.

"It is all right," she whispered.

They walked back to the car. Neither spoke. The chauffeur helped her to her seat. His hand seemed to linger on hers.

"He was my very best friend," he whispered.

Driving home, she sat silent; but still her face was radiant. All things were settled in her mind now, determined irrevocably. Nothing must intervene to halt her in her search. If Burnville failed, she would still keep on. If she herself failed, she would still keep on.

And George Annisford must stand aside.

Laura leaned forward.

"Will you drive past Harbour Park, Ross?"

As she expected, from Harbour Park she saw the taper spars of Annisford's yacht marked against the sky, the gleaming white hull rising from the blue of the lake.

CHAPTER IX

THE MAN IN GREY AGAIN

Burnville, despite his disconcerting experience with the impostor on the *Superior King,* retained an outward show of confidence. "I'm going to find him," he insisted. "If the man in grey is not in town, he's somewhere on the lakes."

Yet Laura Winright felt that all this show of confidence was merely the bluff of a game loser.

Once more she conned the hand-print with Glory Adair.

"Tell me, Glory, what sort of man he really is?"

"Not the sort you saw at the Ocean House," declared the nurse. "This hand belongs to no sailor or longshoreman or roustabout. Those fine lines wouldn't stand the strain of handling casks and hauling ropes. This man uses, not his hands, but his head."

She paused. Her next words were disconcerting.

"When I find him and can read his entire hand and not just the print of a few blurred lines, I'll prove to you that he couldn't commit murder. Mr. Burnville is quite mired?" she added.

"I'm afraid so." Laura meditated. "And what is the meaning, Glory, of all this running about on your part?"

Glory smiled. Her duties as nurse were now merely nominal. She shook a reproving finger. "Time enough to tell you what I'm doing when it's done. Besides, there is Mr. Annisford to keep you interested. When is he going to take me for that promised yacht ride?"

Laura pondered long after the nurse had gone. After

all, George Annisford was a fine fellow. Everyone said so. To marry him was the one logical thing. She had no right to put him off.

He came that evening, heralded by a huge bouquet of American beauties.

"No," she protested, "it's too soon. I never thought this would happen, you know." She felt guilty in thus temporizing; yet the next moment she found herself seeking some new avenue of escape.

Annisford had no sentiment in his soul.

"Let's all take a trip up the lakes," he suggested. "You and I and the nurse and Turkey Bird—yes, and we'll take Fan Sifton and Dog Rover. It'll be heaps of fun to watch Fan. She's mortally afraid of the water. It'll be one long hysteric from Genesis to Revelations. Perhaps it'll do Dog Rover good, too; and if it doesn't," he concluded, cynically, "maybe he'll fall overboard and feed the fishes."

"Poor old Rover!" whispered Laura.

"It would be a God's blessing for all concerned," pursued practical Annisford, "if that dog did die."

Afar across the lake, the sunset bestowed on the waters a lingering kiss. Laura Winright watched in reverent wonder.

"Isn't it beautiful!" she breathed.

"Hit the bullseye, chick, first shot! There's nothing can put it over Old Lake Huron and Old King Sol when it comes to mixing colours. It looks like a cupful of corn syrup splattered over a bowl of tomatoes, or—or a prodigious scrambled egg." He grinned.

She knew George Annisford of old. As a boy he had boyishly made mock of things sacred to her. His exuberant boyishness still clung. She forgave him—almost—for was he not her Predestined Future? Yet the fibres of her soul jarred painfully at his crude simile.

"There's nothing beautiful in nature that appeals to you, George," she reproached.

"Now, chick, don't say that. I appreciate you."

Laura flushed.

"You put the kibosh on all the sunsets that ever came or went. You've got any girl I ever met beaten a mile. I guess I'm a bit weak on scenery, though," he ruefully admitted. "Scenery must have been above par when an economical Providence prepared estimates on me. There's not a speck of it in the inventory. I'd rather watch a bit of action—a big Mogul down there pulling a hundred heavy cars across the viaduct, or a pacer beating the record. Too bad—but what can't be cured, must be endured. Now, Nick Ross," he pursued, "loves sunsets. I found him sitting up there in his den the other evening, smoking and looking out the west window at Lake Huron, brooding on the evening omelette and trying to hatch a complete phonetescope out of it. He'll be a great man some day if that thingumbob of his ever gets finished. There's times when he laughs and I like the fellow, and there's times when he looks as if he were going to write poetry, and then he gets my goat."

Laura, clasping her hands, stared into the sunset, herself brooding. Only two years ago, George's jovial banter had charmed her. And now—

Leaning from her rustic chair, she sought to pluck a pink briar rose from a bush blooming nearby. She pricked her finger on the thorns.

"Hold on, there. Why don't you give a fellow a chance?" Annisford, with a grin, intervened. He wrapped his handkerchief around the thorns, then, gripping the stalk, with his sharp pocket-knife severed the blossom.

"Thank you," she said.

Simultaneously, the thought came, irresistibly sug-

gestive, that other men she had known would have gripped the bush with bare, brave fingers, and then sentimentally would have shown her the marks of the thorns.

She breathed the scent of the pale pink blossoms. The perfume hinted of worlds of sentiment wherein big, cheery, practical George Annisford had no place.

She heard the distant jangle of the telephone.

"That's Mr. Burnville, I suppose. He usually comes to the house."

Katie Sparrow appeared.

"Miss Winright."

"Who is it, Katie?"

"Please, it's Miss Sifton."

Laura went to the telephone. Miss Sifton had been her Sunday School teacher at St. George's, and one of her few close friends in the town. She was a little, bespectacled old maid who in these war times spent all her spare moments knitting.

She was palpably excited.

"Can't you come over, Laura? Right away. I've something important to tell you."

"Tell me over the telephone." Laura's curiosity, aroused, would brook no delay.

"I daren't. Those girls at Central are always snooping."

Laura hesitated. Burnville might come at any moment to report on the day's work.

"Come over yourself, Miss Sifton. I'll send the car for you."

"But—my knitting—".

"Bring your knitting."

Laura called Nick Ross. She wondered if he had again been brooding on the sunset, with that look which made prosaic Annisford think of a poet. She smiled at the

thought, and gave her directions in a carefully commonplace tone.

Within ten minutes Miss Fan Sifton was seated beside her on the porch, her busy needles clicking, Annisford teasing her mercilessly about Dog Rover's ailments. For many moments the little woman fought shy of her theme.

"Miss Adair," she said, as the nurse appeared, "is there anything you could give poor, dear Rover to put him out of his misery? The poor dog does suffer so!"

The nurse smiled ironically at this appeal to her talents. Laura Winright fretted.

Then Miss Sifton surprised her by leaping right to the heart of her subject.

"Laura Winright, do you believe in ghosts?"

"No. Why?"

"Because if there's such a thing as a ghost, I saw a ghost last night."

"A ghost?"

"Your father's ghost."

Annisford checked his exuberant whistle. Glory Adair gripped Laura's hand, encouragingly. For a moment there was no sound save the methodical click of the needles.

"Tell me, Miss Sifton," urged Laura.

The little woman coughed.

"Laura Winright, I could have sworn it was your father. Last night, you know, was moonlight. I was coming home from Harbour Park, toward nine o'clock, and passed Castle Sunset. I just glanced across the lawn toward the garage—you see that fringe of trees there, along the cliff—"

She pointed toward the cedars.

"Yes, yes," urged Laura, breathless.

"I saw someone stealing alongside those trees. For a while he kept close to the shadow. Then, of a sudden,

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he cut right across the lawn to the gate by the garage. I saw him in the moonlight. And then"—she paused, impressively—"then, thinks I, as sure as you're a saved woman, Fan Sifton, that man is—Adam Winright."

Laura shuddered.

"Nonsense," put in Annisford. "Fan Sifton, you were dreaming—or worse."

The intentness of the two young women checked his hilarity.

"But"—Glory spoke—"what made you think of Mr. Winright? For, of course, it wasn't him."

"It was his living image." Her needles and her knitting lay now in Miss Sifton's lap; Laura saw her shiver, and from the lighted porch she peered across the darkening lawn.

"It was his living image," she repeated. "Many and many's the time I've seen him walking along that fringe of cedars, in the early morning and in the evening. You remember, Laura, it was his favourite walk?"

Laura nodded.

"And this man was just his height, as near as I could judge, and with a beard like his."

"Black?" interjected Glory.

"It did seem more like grey. He stood just a minute in the moonlight, and I couldn't be sure. It was more the stoop of his shoulders and the way he walked that seemed familiar."

Glory intervened again.

"Why didn't you tell us at once?"

"I thought it might be fancy," explained Miss Sifton. "I didn't want to alarm you for nothing. But, the more I thought of it, the more it seemed—"

She shivered into silence, and with trembling fingers tried to resume her knitting. Annisford rose.

"I'll tell the police and have the chap pinched! Guess I'll go down to the yacht, now."

Laura watched him cross the lawn toward the garage. She felt Glory Adair's fingers tighten upon hers. Click, click, went the needles, loud in the silence.

The sun had vanished. Shadows carpeted the lawn. The lake was a splash of sombre grey. Fanny Sifton, a tiny, frightened spectre beneath the porch light, was tremblingly dropping stitches.

"Oh!" she fairly screamed, as a step sounded on the walk. Then, with an apologetic laugh: "Why, Mr. Burnville, I thought you were a ghost."

"Perhaps we had better go in," suggested Laura.

Miss Sifton gathered up her knitting. Laura's glance questioned Burnville. He shook his head. The older woman missed this pantomime; her terrified glance was searching the distant shadows where she had seen Adam Winright.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" she shrilled in panic. "Oh! Oh!"

"What is it, Miss Sifton?" Laura, herself frightened, tried to quiet her.

"There! There he is!"

"Who?"

"Your father, Laura Winright."

An instant the girl stood rooted to the spot in horror. The fleeting hope shot through her that this was only a nervous woman's delusion. Then, far back among the cedars, she discerned a vague figure flitting to and fro. It came nearer. It stepped into the light.

Laura cried out. In place of fainting, though, her senses rallied to her aid.

"Glory! Mr. Burnville!"

She did not wait for them. She ran down the porch steps, and across the lawn. In her ears rang Miss Sifton's hysterical call to her to come back.

The tall, stooping, bearded figure in grey still went slinking along the cedar fringe. Laura felt her own heavy heart beats. Her breath came pantingly. She knew that in another minute she must collapse.

Still she ran.

She heard Burnville shouting to her.

"Here!" she cried. "Here he is!"

Laura plunged through a hedge, and found herself right upon the man in grey. He sprang away from her, with a strange, whining cry. She gripped his sleeve. A moment they struggled. This was no ghost, she knew now, but flesh and blood. He did not strike, but with a fierce jerk wrenched himself free.

The girl gasped:

"Mr. Burnville. Run around the garage. Head him off."

Glory came up.

"He's right there," Laura panted. "See."

The nurse took up the chase. Laura, sick and dizzy, slumped to her knees on the grass. She heard Burnville shouting, and Glory's answering halloo, and she tried to struggle up but could not. Then there was the sound of some one tearing through the undergrowth that clothed the face of the hill.

She sank her face in her hands, weeping hysterically.

"Miss Winright!"

Nick Ross came out of the shadows. He had a cigar between his teeth, but he tossed it aside. "What's the matter?" he demanded. "Are you ill?" He proffered his arm.

"It's—it's nothing at all."

"Laura Winright, you're prevaricating. Here. Let me help you back to the porch."

Then she realized for the first time how very weak she was. She crumpled, incontinently; and he caught her

up. She had a vague sense of being carried in strong arms. Then she was lying on a settee on the porch, with Glory Adair bending over her. In the background stood Ross, his face anxious and perturbed.

"Did the man get away?" gasped Laura.

"We nearly had him, when Ross called us," said the nurse. "You'll be all right now. Don't worry. We'll have the man in grey inside a few hours, Mr. Burnville says."

Burnville came up.

"We'll get him." He was jubilant. "He's in town. I've seen him. That's all I want."

Laura struggled up.

"But why?" she demanded. "Why does he come back?"

Burnville gazed at her oddly. He coughed. The cough was plainly a warning. Laura saw the chauffeur, Ross, still standing in the background.

"Thank you, Ross," she said. "I'll be all right, now. You may go."

She felt, self-reproachfully, that she should have said more; that she should not have treated the man so like a common servant. What a pity he was just a servant!

Burnville listened intently to the chauffeur's retreating footsteps.

"Why?" repeated Laura.

"For one of two reasons," responded the detective. "He may be a man with a delusion, mentally unbalanced, unaccountable. Oh—he may have a very good reason for coming back. His work may not be finished."

CHAPTER X

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

So George Annisford, yielding at last to Laura Winright's arguments, decided he would go up-lake alone, and come to Maitland Port for her on his return trip.

"And then?" he insisted.

"Then?" she repeated; but the word held a question.

She had gained time, anyway; time, she argued with herself, was all there was to it. She did not want to marry so soon after her father's death. George should not have claimed, so early, the fulfillment of her promise. There was no other difficulty; the time of course would come when she would marry him gladly, for was he not the one man in the world for her?

When he came back—then, they could discuss the entire problem quietly, sensibly, logically.

Thus she argued with herself, and was glad of the respite. Then "It's all a lie!" she told herself in sudden honesty. "I don't want to marry him, now or ever. Yet I'm letting him go away thinking I have promised to marry him when he comes back. I *have* promised, too."

Yes, that was the truth she had tried to evade with all her mental side-steppings. It stared at her with red eyes from her mirror.

It had been easy to say "Yes" to George Annisford and wear his ring two years before. Then, she was going to England, and marriage was a long way off. It was easy now to say "Then?" with a questioning uptilt, giving him to understand she would wed him when

he came back from up-lake. That, again, was weeks distant, not immediately to be faced, and she could quibble with her conscience that she had given no promise, but had merely asked a question and left the future to answer.

She wrestled with herself in accusatory strain till she was nerve-racked and heart-sick. Then, petulantly, she called Nick Ross to get out the car, and drove far up the river to the Black Hole.

The June day was beautiful, the sun hanging radiant in a huge blue vault decorated with filmy white clouds. The song of the river, never stilled, pursued Laura hauntingly. She breathed deep, and told herself she would put these perplexing problems out of her mind. But she could not.

In desperation she leaned forward.

"Ross!"

He half turned, one eye still on the road ahead, and his hands on the wheel.

"Miss Winright!"

She must remember her place, and his. He had been too pleasantly forward at times. Her tone as she went on was that of a rather haughty mistress to a servant—a good servant, perhaps, but a servant none the less.

"Mr. Annisford says that you write poetry?"

"Not guilty, your ladyship." He defied her haughtiness with mock-humility.

"Did you never feel like it?"

"There are times—times when I watch the sunsets, and times when I think"—he flushed—"when I think of this and that. But it's not for me. I have the phonetescope to keep me busy. A chap in this world can't always do the one best thing. He has to do the first thing that comes to his hand."

To Laura, that explained much; it explained why Nick

Ross had said, "I'm Nick Ross" and thrust out his hand when he should have tipped his chauffeur's cap and stood at attention. It explained, too, her own weakness now. She was doing, with Annisford, not the best thing, but the first thing that came to hand.

"There are things," she said slowly, still in that patronizing tone, "things that are clearly, absolutely right, that ought to be done, *if*—"

She hesitated, not finding just the words she sought. The chauffeur kept his eyes on the road.

"If!" he repeated. "There is no if when a thing is absolutely right. It must be done regardless."

She relapsed into silence. The chauffeur, staring ahead, gave the car an added spurt, apparently quite without reason.

"Ross!"

"Yes, Miss Winright."

"We will go back."

Through the rest of the long ride she sat staring along the wide white road, seeing always George Annisford—George Annisford, going up-lake in his yacht, taking, not her, but her promise.

He would come that afternoon to say good-bye.

Seated on the porch at Castle Sunset, she idly turned the pages of a book, but her thoughts were far from it.

A footstep grated on the gravel walk. She glanced up.

"George! You are going?" She flushed, guiltily, for through her whole being had surged relief.

"That's the word, chick."

Annisford, gayly doffing his cap, sat himself on the steps at her feet.

Laura's book slid to the floor with a bang. Her hands, disengaged, nervously clasped and unclasped, token that her mind was busy. Her perplexing problem gripped her anew. Through her mind surged the few words

Nick Ross, the chauffeur, had spoken a half hour before.

Annisford cheerily searched her blue eyes.

"Why so sad, youngster? Not for my going, I'll venture?"

Laura's wavering eyes shifted to the fallen book. George retrieved it. Scarce knowing what she did, the girl placed it on her lap.

"Thank you," she muttered. "You're leaving right away?"

"The time limit is fixed at half an hour. Jones is to toot the siren for me. I hate to leave you, youngster. But you know, Laura, there's always the coming back we can look forward to."

"Yes."

She seemed to gasp, grappling with a desperate decision.

"George!"

"Here am I." His tone was light.

"George." She hesitated. "I have been thinking—"

"A bad, bad sign." He laughed.

"But I have been thinking, George," she repeated, seriously, "thinking—oh, so hard. Oh, I hate to tell you this—you have been so good to me—but it seems as though I must speak—"

He smiled at her.

"It is better to speak now, George—now, before it is too late—to save your happiness—and mine."

Annisford fixed on her a questioning gaze.

"What is it, chick?" he asked, in a hushed tone. "What is troubling you?"

Gazing downward, she rocked nervously to and fro.

"I have thought," she returned at last, in a low voice, "thought of that question you asked me, the day before I went away to England. I believed I had answered then." Her lips trembled. "But it comes back to me,

it insists—I have thought it over and over. Everything goes back to that. Have you ever really thought of it, George?"

"I—?"

She did not wait for his answer.

"It is a very serious thing, George—marriage is a very serious thing. It is for a long, long time, too. It seems to me that one should think before it is too late—and I have been thinking." Her voice grew firmer. "I must be sure that I care enough for you. You must be sure that you care enough for me. We must both be sure that we're suited to one another. But are we, George?"

She faltered.

"Of course we are," the man rejoined, encouragingly. "Why, Laura, I'd never dream of marrying anyone but you, and you—"

For a moment she did not answer. She hated to wound his feelings; yet she felt that frankness, harshness, cruelty even, would prove kindness in the end.

"Why, we've always known one another," he declared.

"Yet," she returned, quietly, "when you came to say good-bye—"

Rising, Annisford patted her genially on the shoulder.

"Why, Laura, that's just my way. I can't take anything seriously. I'm built on the cheerful plan. But I don't love you any the less because I don't throw a fit when I go away. It's my nature—my training—to be game in affliction—"

"You misunderstand me, George," she said. "It is not that you do not take on—but that *I* do not."

An instant Annisford stood dumfounded; then laughed.

"I don't think any the less of you for that," he rejoined, imperturbably. "Fact is, I probably like you the better that you don't drench my collars with your tears. Come, now, Laura—don't bother your little head any

more about such things. Thinking never brings anything but trouble. So don't think."

Her lips tightened. His honest blindness, his genial disregard of feelings that he could not fathom and did not wish to understand, smiting her, yet spurred her into harsher action. She must, it seemed, be outspoken, even cruel, for his sake as well as for hers.

"When you came just now, George, to say good-bye, I asked myself, 'Do I care for him?' And, George, I—I could not answer 'Yes' to that question."

Her whole tumultuous soul was in the gaze she fixed on him. An instant later she was sobbing, she could not have told why.

"It was hard for me to say it," she whispered to herself. "Hard—"

Gazing through her tears, she saw Annisford's pitying, almost paternal smile. He refused to grasp the import of her words.

"Laura, I know just what you need. A jolly outing to some cheerful place where you'll meet lots of live people. Just go away for a week or two, and have such a good time that you won't find a minute to think—"

"And, George, till I do know that I can care for you, that I do care for you as a wife should—things can never again be as they were."

With a quick movement she pressed the ring into his hand. The big man, opening his fingers, blinked at the diamond as it sparkled in the afternoon sunshine.

"This man—Burnville?" he muttered.

The question startled her.

She shook her head. "There is no one."

"No one?" he repeated, in puzzled fashion.

"No one." She gazed frankly into his eyes.

She fancied for an instant that his lips drew down at the corners. A moment later he smiled at her, his manner

as carelessly cheerful as though he merely asked her for a dance.

"It's just the one question, George," she pursued, "whether I care or not. And I do not think I care."

An instant he stood with head bowed, a shadow resting on his handsome face. At last he looked gayly up.

"By Jove, Laura, that's no compliment to me. Thrown out—disqualified. It's no comfort, either. If you'd named another starter in the race, I could have induced him to withdraw." He smiled at his big fist, artistically doubled.

She smiled too, for the first time, grateful that he was not taking this ordeal so hard. It seemed not a tithe so difficult for him to listen as for her to speak. "No compliment to him"—his light, airy manner was, she mused, no compliment to her; but it was a help without which she could never have persisted.

"You would not!" she protested.

"You're right, Laura, I wouldn't. I'd wish him joy. Not that I'd need to, girl—to my reckoning, you and joy would be just the same."

His spirits could not have been lighter had they been chatting at a tennis match.

"I'm sorry, chick," he added, with a deep, unwonted note of tenderness. "But, after all, I guess it's better."

"You won't feel badly, George," she pleaded. She felt that she owed him, for all his kindness, a little more than she had said—some word of consolation, even though he needed it so little. "Why, there's thousands of better girls—girls better suited to you—better than I am in every way—"

With protesting hand uplifted, he gazed reproachfully into her eyes.

"Don't, youngster! Don't try to kid me with a lot of

bosh like that. You're the best girl, Laura—always were, are, and always will be."

His voice thrilled with serene defiance.

"But, George, you mustn't waste your life for me."

Her tone pleaded. She laid a little hand lightly upon his big one, which still fingered the ring with the glittering diamond.

"Waste my life, chick! Not I. Why, Laura, do you know what I mean to do right now?"

"You're going up the lakes—going on the *Beatrice*."

"True for you," he responded, quickly. "But that's not what I mean. Do you know what I intend to do about what you just told me?"

She gazed straight at him, an anxious question in her wide eyes.

"What are you going to do?"

"Just what I'd do if the big store were to burn down and the fire insurance companies to break and all leave me penniless. I'm going to begin again right at the beginning, dear. I'm going to fight a man's fight, right up from the foot of the hill. And, Laura, I'm going to win you back. There's just one partnership for me, girl—that's Annisford and Winright."

Her look was soberly reproachful.

"No, George," she answered, in quiet, even tones, "you will not do that. You will not try to win me."

"Just watch me," he defied her.

"You will not do that, George," she insisted, "because you are not a man to give me needless pain. For my sake as well as for your own, George, you will give me up, now—and for all time. For my sake—for yours—you will not speak of these things again."

He bowed his head, and for many moments was silent. Anxiously she waited.

"It's not fair, Laura," he at length burst forth. "Why,

you just put me out of court. I'm not getting a fighting chance—"

"But for my sake, George—for yours—you must," she repeated, in tones quiet but decided. "These things end here. In future we will not—must not—speak of them."

She gazed at him with an air of finality. For a moment they both were silent. From the foot of the hill sounded the deep-voiced, musical siren of the *Beatrice.*

"You are going?" Laura Winright asked.

"Yes." He turned quite calmly toward the walk. "That's the signal. The *Beatrice* is waiting. Good-bye, Laura—"

With a quick step forward and a sudden movement he caught her in his arms and kissed her fervently. She did not shrink from him.

"It's the last time," he declared, still smiling. "There, youngster, I'm off. Guess I'll cut across the lawn and see if Nick's car is in commission. Good-bye, chick, and thank God you're rid of me."

"Good-bye," she muttered.

He had taken a half dozen paces when, rising, she hurried down the steps.

"George!"

He turned, his face illumined. Impetuously she ran to him.

"We'll always be the best of friends, you know, George," she pleaded. "Always the best of friends."

She longed to console him, even though his smile told her that she had inflicted no hurt.

"You've always been—you'll always be—my very best friend? Isn't that so?"

"Why, sure, little girl!"

She stretched forth her hand. He clasped it warmly. Tears leapt to her eyes. She gazed timidly down at the grass.

"Good-bye," she repeated.

She felt the warm hand-clasp relax.

"Good-bye, chick," he answered, cheerily.

She did not watch him go. Swinging sharply in the moment of parting, she gazed fixedly out across the blue waters of the lake, lying far below. The June day was aglow with sunshine that not alone thrilled the world before her eyes, but crowded into her soul till there was room for nothing else there. Never had she thought her bondage so hard as now, when the snapping of her chains opened to her all the undreamed-of joy of freedom. The world was before her, and youth was hers.

"Free!" she whispered joyously, racing toward the cedars that bounded the lawn, her hands outstretched in welcome to the blue lake that, free like herself, danced with equal joy in the sunshine.

Afar across the harbour at her moorings lay the *Beatrice,* with her white hull and burnished funnels and taper spars, impatiently awaiting her master's coming. Again the siren sounded.

"And George?" Laura Winright questioned, with a touch of self-reproach.

Her eyes flashed toward the distant garage. She had not heard the car. George must have passed long ago through the latticed gate. She did not glimpse him anywhere about the brick building. Her eyes retraced the path he must have taken across the lawn, till they came home to the grass at her feet. In all that distance she could not find him.

He might still be in the garage; or else, hurrying faster than she had fancied, had turned the bend in the roadway and was perhaps by this time descending Harbour Hill.

Hesitating a moment, Laura slowly took the path he had followed. Half way to the lattice-fence, she halted,

her foot on the threshold of the little summer-house. She peered in awe-struck silence into the semi-darkness of the place.

George Annisford knelt on the ground, his head bowed upon the rustic seat, his hands tight-clenched. His whole figure quivered, but no sound escaped him.

The girl gazed at him a terrified moment, her soul filled with a strange horror—horror of her own light-hearted joy of but an instant before. Tears rushed to her eyes. Instinctively she stretched forth her hands toward him, and took one silent step across the threshold.

Then she halted, and her hands sank to her sides. Her freedom had been bought, and each of them had almost paid the price.

Without a word, without a backward glance, she turned and, silent as in her coming, retraced her steps to Castle Sunset.

CHAPTER XI

THE 'PHONE MESSAGE FROM NILE

Laura Winright went straight to her room. There she stayed till with a defiantly cheerful scream of the melodious siren, the *Beatrice* sped like a flash of light down the dark lane between the twin piers. She stayed, watching, till the taper spars merged in the horizon.

Yes, she was free!

Now she felt miserable; more miserable than ever in her life before. She had done a selfish, unkind thing to the one man who loved her; she had done it under the hypocritical profession that it was for his sake as well as for hers.

That Annisford's habitual good cheer might mask deeper feelings she had never dreamed. The haunting recollection of the unplumbed depths into which she had gazed piled up misery for her in the days that followed.

More than once she was tempted to write Annisford, to go back on what she had done, to bid him come to Maitland Port for her on his south-bound trip.

Womanly pride alone restrained her. She was the sort of girl who intuitively waits to be wooed. And, in her insistence to shut off all possibility of a change of heart, she herself had absolutely forbidden George Annisford to woo her.

She could only wait, and feel miserable, and try to comfort herself with the thought: "This search for the man in grey comes first."

The next morning's mail brought a letter from Tom, at Detroit.

"I've just been called to New York on important business for the store, and will be gone a week. Burnville has full authority to draw on Airth & Kinzie for any funds he may need. If any messages come to Castle Sunset for me, don't wait to forward them; open them yourself and use your own judgment as to answering."

He went on to detail the business which called him to New York. There was a post-script, which Laura Winright did not at once notice:

"P. S. Keep a sharp look-out for this fellow Webster. Burnville feels certain he's still hanging around Maitland Port. If he takes the risk of staying, you may be sure it's for no good purpose."

The sweltering heat of midsummer drove Laura Winright to a hammock on the wide porch overlooking Lake Huron. She rocked softly to and fro, pondering Tom's letter, and particularly that post-script. Despite their pursuit, the menacing man in grey had made a complete getaway. There had been no glimpse of him since the night Laura grappled with him on the lawn. Yet though she never saw him, she felt his menacing presence always near her.

A step on the porch and a boyish whistle heralded Glory Adair—Glory Adair, no longer in starchy uniform, but in a fluffy white, with a filmy parasol and an out-of-doors smile illumining her brown eyes.

"I'm through," she announced.

"Don't say that," urged Laura Winright. "Just sit and talk to me, Glory. I can't let you go."

"You can't help yourself."

But the nurse did not go. She perched herself mannishly on the porch rail.

"I can't stay more than a few minutes. You'll see my reason for staying that long if you turn your head."

"Mr. Burnville!"

"Precisely."

Burnville came swinging up the walk. He glanced quizzically at Glory. "My esteemed rival." His smile, as he sat down, was blandly irritating.

"At your service, Mr. Burnville." Yet all the while the brown eyes seemed to demand: "What brings you here so early?"

"I wish to Heaven," exclaimed Burnville, "that Andrew Webster had the only grey beard on earth. I spent all yesterday lining up a grey-bearded man who had been seen in Ashfield township. False alarm, as usual! Miss Winright, we're going to get him. There's not a shadow of doubt. He's here. He's hiding. He won't leave Maitland Port till he's accomplished his purpose, whatever that is. And he can't stay around here without being caught. . . . But you can't land the man you want without running down a lot of false scents. I learned that long ago."

A lambent fire played in Glory's eyes.

"Oh!" she observed.

"You know it, you cold-blooded critter!" flashed Burnville. "I've got a hundred people, Miss Winright, on the look-out for that man in grey. I've seen every country constable for miles around."

"In short, the dragnet?" put in Miss Adair.

"Yes. The dragnet, as thorough as one can make it in a place like Maitland Port."

"It's an excellent system—when you're after an ordinary criminal."

"So I think."

"Only, this criminal isn't ordinary."

"Oh?"

Burnville's monosyllable held a question.

In Glory's eyes danced a malicious light. She enjoyed the daring game of teasing this practical criminal-hunter. She liked Harry Burnville for his relentless thoroughness. She had no contempt for his methods; rather respect, of a profound order.

"You're floundering," she ventured. "You need a helping hand? Mine?" She extended it to him, a pretty hand, very slim, and almost pallidly white.

He took the tips of her fingers.

"Mine without the asking?"

She did not flush, as Laura Winright would have done.

"No. Not till your wits make a better showing. I'm really sorry for you, Mr. Burnville. May I help you with a tip? I've a few minutes to spare. Is it a go? Then listen."

She leaned toward him, just a touch of insolence in her smile. Burnville's satiric look did not change. They admired and respected and hated one another very thoroughly, thought Laura. She glanced across the sweltering lawn.

"It's hot," she protested. "Just see how that poor old Madeira vine is drooping! Please don't fight, you two."

"He won't. He's going to sit at the feet of Gamaliel for a few minutes. You'll never catch that man, Mr. Burnville."

"Why?"

"Because you're not looking for him."

"No?"

"No. You're just looking for his alias."

"Oh?"

Harry Burnville, reticent, yet enquiring, retired behind a Verdun of monosyllables.

"He's a forgery, this man in grey, this Andrew Webster."

Burnville smiled.

"I've discounted that. Either 'Andrew Webster' is an alias, or the real Andrew Webster is travelling under an assumed name. I surmise, too, that even the grey beard may be a disguise."

Glory laughed.

Laura resented the laugh. Glory Adair, she felt, had her drawbacks. She was a bit unfeeling. She discussed these issues with the calm professional manner of an experienced surgeon conducting a clinic. To Laura Winright, they were issues of life and death.

"Where you professional detectives are hampered is in not knowing palmistry. It would help you immensely, Mr. Burnville. Why don't you take a course?"

She was deadly serious.

"I mean it. Oh, you scientific detectives now-a-days are marvellously equipped. You mug every criminal or possible criminal on earth. You have your rogues' galleries, your filing cabinets full of statistics, your specialists, your Bertillon records of every poor wretch who falls into your clutches, yet—yet you blindly ignore the one master-key that will unlock the mystery of every crime. The human hand!"

Burnville smiled, sceptically.

"It is very interesting," he said, with mock politeness.

"And very true. Look at this, Mr. Burnville." She caught Laura's hand. "If this girl were a stranger to you—if you arrested her on suspicion—you could photograph her, and look up her record, and take her Bertillon measurements and her finger-tip signatures. But wouldn't it be worth infinitely more to sit down with a microscope

and in a few minutes tell the world specifically whether she did or did not commit the crime of which she stood accused? You could do that—if you could read her hand."

"We haven't this—this Andrew Webster's hand-print," retorted the detective.

"Except on the telegram."

Burnville hesitated.

"Ye-es," he admitted.

"You doubt it?"

"I suppose it's a logical inference that they are one and the same. What does the hand-print tell you?"

"That is part of my case. It will be part of yours when you learn palmistry. But we have Adam Winright's hand-prints. I have them here." She opened her portfolio. "I secured them nearly two years ago."

Laura handled the grimy fragments of blotting paper with a sense of shrinking. They called back the lighted parlour, her father lying under the white sheet, and the clammy hand she grasped in hers while she patiently studied the lines.

"What does that hand-print tell you?" challenged Glory. "Nothing. But it tells me that you're mistaken about Adam Winright handling those letters we found in his desk."

"Oh?" Harry Burnville entrenched himself behind the sceptical monosyllable.

"How do I know? See these finger-tips. This line of the head. System. Order. Steadiness. A clear, orderly, business-like life, all through. Such a man would not leave letters lying loose in a drawer—"

"Under stress of excitement?" Burnville was interested despite himself.

"Surely?" agreed Laura.

"System. Order. Steadiness," repeated Glory, "faith-

fully followed through thirty busy years. You can't change that nature in a day. You say Adam Winright was alarmed and excited, so he left those letters lying loose. Dear girl, your father just couldn't do that. It would have been a crime against his nature. Look at your hand, Laura—see those impetuous lines, and that depression, and those finger-tips. You can't shift one of those lines, or build up that depression, or grow finger-tips like mine. These old, square fingers spell steadiness and self control, dear; yours indicate impetuosity turning to resolve; you, Mr. Burnville, you"—she laughed—"you're the man who keeps his own counsel, works out his own campaign, thoroughly—oh, so thoroughly! Yet you lack the wider vision. Whatever we poor humans do, we do according to those lines. They are the lines of our destiny. We may do big things or little things, mean things or generous, bold or timid—but we do them just the one way our hand indicates. Each hand has its dominant characteristic. Mine is steadiness; yours, Laura, is impetuosity plus stubbornness; yours, Mr. Burnville, is secrecy and thoroughness; and—Adam Winright's was system."

Her eyes sparkled. Deep conviction rang in her clear tones. Yet Burnville's face wore a bland smile, covering all hint of feeling.

"Under stress—?"

"Mr. Burnville, listen, won't you? Under the stress of knowing that he was to die in a few hours, perhaps in a few minutes, Adam Winright walked to the telephone, called Doctor Chalmers, gave him directions in an unexcited voice, and then returned to the table where you, Laura, found him. That was the supreme stress, and he stood the test. He was not shaken by that; would he be entirely unnerved by threats?"

Laura Winright found no answer. Burnville, if he found one, did not voice it.

"Adam Winright never saw those letters."

"Glory!"

"I've said it."

"But—in dad's own desk—"

"I mean it, just the same. Take any circumstance you like. Look at those old books and papers we found, all tied and arranged in order. Look at your own letters, Laura, in that same desk, every one of them arranged by date. And then Mr. Burnville picks up this bunch of loose letters, lying every-which-way, and—I'm disgusted!"

The jangle of the telephone indoors mingled with her concluding exclamation. She disregarded it. The mockery of a scowl crossed her fair face.

Burnville spoke.

"I have anticipated a disguise," he said, complacently. "I have calculated on an alias. When we find this man, he will be grey-bearded, wearing a shabby grey suit. He may not be Andrew Webster. He may be rich or poor —it doesn't matter. He does exist. We know that. We've all seen him. And I'll get him. Perhaps sooner than you think, you precious sceptic."

Laura had gone, unnoticed by either. In the engrossing argument, the disputants disregarded even the oppressive heat. Despite the lake breeze, the air hung heavy.

Laura Winright returned.

"The telephone, Mr. Burnville."

Burnville rose.

"I hate to leave the field to you, Miss Adair. But I'll come back to fight it out. . . . I left word at the hotel that I could be reached here," he added, in explanation.

He returned in a moment, once more his brisk self. He had no time for argument; he was bent on business.

"Thank you, Miss Adair, for your neat disquisition. Theory is an excellent thing, particularly if it's perfectly sound. In the next twenty-four hours I hope to reciprocate by demonstrating the results of practical work. Of course I don't tell you everything, but I may remark, that the Nile constable apparently had an awful cold."

Glory gazed at Laura Winright while the detective's heels crunched the gravel.

"That means," she interpreted, "that he's just got a telephone message from Nile, a little hamlet away out in the country. From the constable there. It concerns the man in grey. And Harry Burnville thinks his chase is ended." She took up her portfolio. "Well, Miss Winright, I'm going. My patient, I think, can survive without me."

Laura Winright spent the sultry day in a state of nervous apprehension. Burnville's absolute certainty stood out in strong contrast to Glory's plausible theorizing. Laura did not know which to take at its face value. There was, too, haunting her every moment the imminence of developments of which the detective had given only a hint.

From Maitland Port to Nile was several hours' drive. Probably Burnville would have a long chase after he got there. She might not hear from him till nightfall; maybe not till next morning.

Despite the oppressive heat, her nervous apprehension drove her to any form of action. She called the garage, intending to take out the car. No one answered. Ross, evidently, had deserted his post again.

Early evening found her again on the porch, panting with the intense, lingering heat. She would welcome a breeze, even if it were a hurricane.

Katie appeared in the doorway.

"The telephone, Miss!" she announced. "For you."

Laura did not wait to argue. She knew what to expect. The message might, indeed, be mere trivial gossip, and —yes, it might be from Burnville, *the* message for which she had all day been waiting.

Just outside the library door, she caught up the receiver.

"This is Laura Winright. Who is speaking?"

She heard only a strange gabble—a man's voice, but no distinguishable words.

"Please repeat that," she urged.

"This is Harry Burnville." The words at last shaped themselves clearly out of the gabbling undertone. The voice seemed strange, excited, a bit hoarse. "Miss Winright, I have him—I have the man in grey."

CHAPTER XII

THE RIDE IN THE STORM

"So Mr. Burnville was right," thought Laura. She could picture him gloating over Glory Adair, blandly triumphing in this speedy vindication. "Tell me all about it!" she urged, aloud.

The answering voice was hurried and excited.

"I'm sorry, Miss Winright, but there are reasons—you can understand, of course—I really can't tell you over the telephone—"

For the moment Laura saw no reasons. She filled the transmitter with eager urgings. The detective's voice cut in:

"It's impossible. More than that, if you wish to see the man in grey alive—to hear his story from his own lips—you must come at once."

"Where are you?"

"I am at Robert Carruthers'—984 ring 21—on the Colborne Road, just past Otter Creek. You know the deep gully—?"

"Yes—with the white wooden bridge?" She knew Robert Carruthers and his plump, good-natured wife; they were friends of her old Sunday School teacher, Miss Sifton, and Laura had spent an occasional afternoon at the farm-house before she went abroad. "I know the place. A cottage with spruce trees and a tall white fence in front?"

"That's it. The second house past the bridge on the right-hand side." Manifestly, Burnville was eager to

fix the exact location in her mind. "Well, they have a hired man. He's known out here as Thad Smith. He's down with typhoid and if he gets better, it'll be a miracle. He's the real Andrew Webster. It's more by good luck than good management that I found him, Miss Winright," confessed Burnville, modestly. "But he is here, and admits his identity; and he wants to tell his story direct to you."

To Laura's first astonished clearness of vision succeeded bewilderment. What was she to do? Her mind was by no means orderly in emergency. Fervently she wished for Glory Adair. But Glory had gone back to the Barracks. Yet—

Burnville's next words anticipated her.

"Please do not whisper a word of this to anyone, Miss Winright. Particularly to Miss Adair. Never mind why—there are important reasons. You must trust my discretion."

"Yes, yes." She hardly knew to what she assented.

"You can take the car," pursued Burnville, "and be there inside an hour or so."

Laura Winright stiffened.

"I can rely on your coming?"

"Y-yes."

"You are sure of the place? Robert Carruthers, Colborne Road, second house past the Otter Creek bridge, on the right hand side—"

"A cottage with a tall white fence and spruce trees in front?"

"Yes. I rely on you. Good-bye."

He rang off.

Laura Winright sank into a chair. The suddenness of it all appalled her. That for which Burnville had worked these many weeks with such persistent thoroughness had come in a moment; and, if Burnville's words

meant anything, had come more by accident than through design. What had the man in grey to tell? Now that the dénouement was crowding so close, the girl shrank from it, appalled at what it might disclose.

In the midst of such musings she roused herself with a start.

One thing was essential. That was to reach Carruthers' with the least possible delay. "If you wish to see him alive . . . you must come at once." Burnville had said that. The message was imperative.

What was she to do?

Before she realized what she did, she called the Barracks. It was only when a nurse answered the call that Laura remembered, with a flush, Burnville's emphatic warning to keep silence. Glory, fortunately, had gone out for the evening. The nurse did not know when she would be back.

Laura breathed relief.

She was left entirely to her own resources. That much was plain. And her own resources were limited to a rapid motor trip to the Carruthers' farm, leaving Maitland Port with the least possible delay.

She went to the window. The sun was sinking in the crimsoned waters of the lake. There was a hint of breeze stirring the cedars on the hillside—very faint, the merest zephyr. On the lower edge of the huge ball of fire in the west clung a dark speck of cloud. Laura's gaze took in the distant garage.

When last she called, in the afternoon, Nick Ross was away. He might be away now.

Burnville's call had been insistent. Yet Laura Winright sat a moment, thinking of Nick Ross as Annisford had jestingly pictured him, staring into the sunset with the eyes of a poet. Despite herself, she could not help

linking that picture with her own vision of Annisford himself going up-lake in his beautiful yacht, alone.

If it had been possible for her to send Annisford away, the fact was due to Nick Ross—to what Ross had said on that drive to the Black Hole. His were the words that had spurred her faltering soul to cruel action. For the first time she realized it. She almost hated him for it. *He* had led her to send away the one man who loved her—why? She found no answer.

Like Nick Ross, she stared into the sunset, watching the tiny cloud slowly grow till it cast a shadow across the lake.

She started up, and went to the black box in the Ghost Room. She sat before it a long time, indecisive. She found herself strangely hesitant. It was as though she were in the presence of Ross himself, tall, straight, sunburned, with his devil-may-care swagger and his poet's eyes, his cynical jest and his heart full of sentiment. She shrank from him, while—she realized it with a shock—Andrew Webster perhaps lay dying at Carruthers' waiting to confess himself to her.

She lifted the receiver from the black box. If Ross were not there, she could get a public taxicab in a few minutes. She would. She hoped Ross were not there. She almost dreaded to meet him.

The chauffeur's level voice cut into her thoughts.

"Hello, Castle Sunset!"

"Ross?"

She felt her heart beat violently, and her breath came in nervous gasps. She wondered if he could hear the message she hardly heard herself.

"I must—positively must—go out to the country this evening, about fifteen miles. Can you have the car ready in ten minutes?"

Had he heard? Or would he stupidly insist on her

going over the entire message? Anticipating that, she tried hard to control her nervousness.

The level voice spoke again.

"In four minutes and forty-three and a half seconds, Laura Winright."

His devil-may-care laugh floated to her over the wire.

She hung up the receiver, angry at his presumption—no, almost angry! In another minute she was laughing. How like the fellow it was! "Ross," she had said, as to a common servant. "Laura Winright," he had answered, as to a bosom friend. The impertinence of the man! After all, he was a common servant—what a pity, when the Lord had made him so uncommonly likeable!

Nervously she made ready. The chauffeur had the car at the curb within four minutes. Laura Winright hurried down the gravel walk. Nick Ross, standing with his hand on the open door, spoke:

"Isn't it chilly enough for a coat?"

She gave him a bright smile.

"I'm shivering!" she jested.

Then she noticed that the top of the car was up. Yes, and his eyes were serious.

"You've six minutes and twenty-one seconds to spare. Get a coat of some sort—preferably a rain-coat with a real, waterproof guarantee."

Laura followed the direction of his gaze. The western sky was ominously shadowed. The tiny cloud of a few moments before had grown into a monstrous shape that, like a dark bird, overhung the lake and with the tips of its far-spreading wings shadowed the land.

"That means a whale of a storm," commented Nick Ross. "If it's a pleasure drive you're planning, I'll head the car right back to the garage."

"It's not a pleasure drive." She deliberately made her

tone cold and aloof. The man needed to be put in his place, if that were possible.

She cast a thoughtful glance toward the lowering sky; then went into the house. In the hallway she encountered Mrs. MacTurk.

It was, she remembered, the old woman's night out. And Katie had gone. She had to leave the house alone. Any other time she would have hesitated. But with the menacing man in grey safely located and too ill to move, that did not matter.

"Lock everything, Mamma Judy," she commanded. "I'll be back in a little while. I'll take a key."

Within a few minutes the car was speeding around the river bend and down the hill toward the Saltford bridge. "Robert Carruthers, Colborne Road, second house past Otter Creek—and hurry." That order, she mused, covered everything.

The rumbling of the car across the long bridge was thunderous in the close air. Turning her head a little, Laura's eyes searched the west, whence advancing legions of black clouds were hurling themselves toward the zenith. Low, fitful lightning flashes ran along the sky.

A cool breeze smote her cheek as, sweeping through Saltford, the car turned up the Colborne Hill. From far across the lake came the muffled roll of thunder. Laura glanced at Nick Ross. He leaned a little forward, his expression animated, as though the menacing storm were a whole-hearted joy to him.

She put on her coat. She shrank from even a casual glance at Ross. She found herself hoping he had not noticed, would not notice, the coat, but—the slapping wind grew chill.

They swept past the white buildings of Point Farm. Almost imperceptibly the chauffeur was speeding up the car. The road was quite deserted. Pedestrians were

rare at any time; vehicles had fled from the threat of the storm. From the west came a steady growl of thunder. Fitful lightnings lit a wide white ribbon in front of them. Nick Ross turned.

"Miss Winright, I'm for duty first and pleasure afterward. This looks like a jolly big storm. What do you say to turning in here till the worst is past?"

"No," returned Miss Winright.

She fancied a rain-drop slapping her cheek. Its challenge spurred her to a wild defiance.

"We will go right through to Carruthers'."

Ross stopped the car. He descended; she instinctively shrank back in her seat. His eyes were shining; she felt reassured.

"I'm going to let down the curtains." He quickly did so, studying the sky at intervals. "Say, it's a peach of a storm—a real ripper, Miss Winright! Our flivver is due for a jolly good bath!" He resumed his seat. "Hadn't you better——?"

The car leapt ahead, without waiting her answer. Laura thrilled with the joy of the challenge.

"Straight through!" she cried. She no longer saw Nick Ross, nor the storm, but only the end of the road, the end of their long pursuit of the murderer, Andrew Webster. "Straight through!"

"If the engine holds up," agreed Ross. "I'll bet you ten cents it will."

The curtains flapped furiously, striving to tear themselves free from their fastenings. Then the full fury of the storm burst. The dark clouds, now high overhead, blotted out the lingering light. Laura could see nothing to either side; but, gazing ahead, she had a vague glimpse of tall trees at the roadside bending till they almost snapped. White buildings, clear an instant earlier, were blotted out as by a dense mist.

Then, on the hood of the car, came the heavy drum beat of the rain—first a rat-tat-tat of huge drops, then the gushing roar of a united downpour.

Along the road the headlights, still gleaming, marked an uncertain path. Again Nick Ross spoke, but this time he did not turn: Laura sensed that his keenest watchfulness was needed to pick the way.

"It's a beautiful little hurricane. There's never been one like it on the west shore, I'll wager. Can you stand it? Really——"

She saw neither Ross nor himself; only the man she sought at the end of the road, dying, with his message unheard.

"I have to reach Carruthers'."

"See how those trees are bending." She fancied at last a note of anxiety in his voice. "There goes a branch." She heard it whip the hood as it fell. "This road may be blocked anywhere by a tree. Then, the Otter Creek bridge is rotten If the road's blocked——"

"If the road is blocked, then we—I, at least—will go on foot. But, storm or no storm, I intend to reach Carruthers.' " The rage of the elements menaced her, but they could not make her afraid.

The car swerved, avoiding some danger that she could not see. It rocked like a tiny cockle-shell on the ocean. Laura clutched the cloak-rail beside her.

"We daren't go on," insisted Ross.

"Are you afraid?"

The lightning lit a clear road for a hundred yards ahead. He turned, for the first time since the storm broke.

"Afraid? Nick Ross?" His white teeth gleamed in a smile. "Say, this is the real thing! It beats the old phonetescope a thousand miles. Only"—the smile vanished—"I'm a bit afraid for you."

"Then go on."

"D'you mean it?"—eagerly.

"Go on."

A thunder crash emphasized her words. The man centred his every attention on the wheel and the road ahead. To her impatient fancy he seemed reducing speed. Did he mean to stop anyway, regardless?

"Faster," she cried, leaning forward lest the clamour of the storm drown her words.

The car bounded ahead, skidding to and fro on the slippery roadway. Suddenly it turned out; a fallen tree from an adjoining field lay across the road. Ross turned almost into the ditch. For an instant the car balanced dangerously. With steady hand the chauffeur made the difficult turn. Laura felt her heart leap when a lightning flash illumined the danger they were passing.

Ross told her, in jerky exclamations. He slackened speed a little.

"Keep going," she urged, recklessly. "We're almost there."

"I know that. The Otter Creek bridge must be just ahead. It's old and due for demolition any day. You can't lean against it without hearing it creak." He did not look around. "There's no telling what a gale like this might do. Oh, I'll get you there, Laura Winright, but I mean to keep you safe, whether you will or no. See! There's the bridge, right ahead."

He flung his weight on the brake. Rising, she leaned forward. She caught his arm.

"No. You must not stop."

He tore his arm free. The car halted, with a jerk, followed by violent jarring and grinding. The headlights went out. Blank darkness lay all about them.

"Why did you stop?"

She sensed rather than saw that Ross had flung himself backward in the seat.

"Steady, Miss Winright. Don't lean forward. The least weight may jar us loose."

Apprehension shot through her. The thrill of excitement gave place to sickening reaction. The intoxication of her speed-madness had gone, leaving her weak.

"There is probably no danger."

His tone was reassuring: but she knew that he had discerned in the darkness some peril she could not see.

"What is it?"

She strained her eyes into the night.

"No," he repeated, sternly, "do not lean forward. Sit back." He turned cautiously, and, reaching out his arm, snapped open the door beside her. "You must get down. I daren't leave this seat to help you."

She silently obeyed. Outside, she stood in drenching rain and inky darkness.

A flash of fire lit heavens and earth. Below her lay a gaping chasm, its depths black and fathomless. From it there loomed a skeleton framework of timbers swaying and creaking in the gale. The car hung on the edge of the stone-work, its front wheels dangling over the brink of the chasm.

"Oh!" she cried, shrilly; and, shrinking from the gaping maw beneath her, flung herself against the car.

She felt the car give. She was flung, sprawling, in the roadway. Above the dying roll of the thunder and the relentless swish of the rain came a terrible grinding and crashing.

The car was gone. Laura Winright stared a moment into inky darkness; then the driving rain blinded her.

CHAPTER XIII

THE END OF THE RIDE

Laura cried out in mortal terror; but no answer rose from the darkness. There was only the wind whipping her face, and the ceaseless, drenching swish of the rain.

The car, rumbling and crashing, had doubtless reached the bottom of the gully instantly.

"He didn't cry out. Ross didn't," she told herself, hopefully. "If he'd fallen with the car he'd have shouted. He was just getting out; of course he's safe. Ross! Ross!" she called.

For the first time she was conscious that the rain had drenched her to the skin. She shivered, and wondered why Ross did not come, or call.

A lightning flash lit the desolate road. Laura saw, with horror, that she was alone.

Trembling, sick, she groped her way toward the edge of the abutment. She knelt as close as she dared, and stared into the shadowy gulf, trying to picture the scene below as she had known it in daylight. There was a wide, deep gully, through which a shallow creek trickled amid boulders; and, spanning it, the old, wooden bridge.

Plucking up hope, she shouted into the gulf, but there was no response.

Vaguely she remembered a precipitous footpath down the side of the gully to the edge of the creek. When next the lightning came her quick eyes found the path.

The next minute she went stumbling downward in

the darkness, slipping, sliding, clinging to the rank grass. At every flash she strained her eyes to pierce the depths.

Unexpectedly she felt her foot slip. She was falling. Instinctively she flung herself face downward on the steep bank, clinging with tenacious fingers to the long grass.

For a long moment she lay thus, her heart pounding, the rain beating violently upon her. Then, feeling her way cautiously, she once more found the path, and resumed her slow descent.

The next flash showed her the car, upturned.

"Ross! Hello, Ross!" she cried.

Ross did not answer.

"He's dead!" she groaned.

She forgot danger. No longer trying to pick her way, she stumbled, fell, rolled in a crushed heap among the stones. Bruised and sore, she presently found herself on her feet, and staggered blindly across the boulder-strewn level at the bottom of the gully.

She ran against the car. The impact hurled her back. The machine lay wrecked, its wheels in air. With anxious, trembling fingers Laura tore aside the curtains. She thought she saw Ross inside, crushed, dead, and uttered a little cry, and shrank away, with face averted.

Then, guided by another illuminating flash, she went stumbling over the stones.

"Nick!" she cried, and knelt beside him where he lay, silent, insensible.

With nervous fingers she loosed his collar, tore open his shirt. She listened, anxiously, and, hearing nothing, bowed her head with a choking cry. Then, wildly, she started up.

"He's alive!" she gasped. "He's alive!" Scarcely knowing what she did, she knelt again, chafing his cold hands.

He could not lie there. She must do something.

What, she did not know. Her impetuosity ran far ahead of her reason. She tried to gather him in her arms, to carry him; and sank in a moment, panting, exhausted, with her heavy load.

Ross groaned.

The drenching rain was reviving him, but she did not know it. The groan terrified her anew. She became suddenly conscious that she was standing in water. The creek, swollen by the rain, was slowly rising about the boulders. Panic-stricken, the girl shouted again and again for help; but there was no answer.

In her desperation she tried to think collectively. She must leave Ross here. She could not carry him. She must go for help. There was a house just a few steps past the bridge, on the further side of the creek. Carruthers' was still further, but she could not go that far.

She gave the chauffeur one last glance. The waters surely could not rise that far in the few minutes she would be gone. "I'll be right back," she whispered into his unheeding ears.

Then she went running over the stones, across the uneven creek bed, stumbling, falling, but ever running on. She came to a shallow, foaming torrent. She plunged in, above her ankles, above her knees. The chill of the water, colder than the rain, made her cry out, and the slippery rock gave uncertain footing. She went resolutely on. She must get help; she must get help at once. All other things were blotted out of her mind.

She found herself, how she never knew, painfully dragging herself up the further bank.

"It's only a step," she told herself, "only a step past the crest." Yet it was a long time—it seemed an endless time—before, slipping and falling and trying again, she gained the crest. She glanced back upon the gully, gaping blackly behind her; then, in sheer terror of the

rising water, ran up the road, calling in vain hope of someone hearing her.

She turned into the first farm lane, and, shivering, stumbled to the door of the house. Impatiently she knocked again and again. She fancied people moving about. She heard ghostly noises within and without, the drip of the rain, the swish of branches.

"Oh, God, will they never come!" she groaned.

She could fancy the striking of the match, the lighting of lamps, slow-minded question and answer—and all the while Nick Ross dying down there in the gully, and Laura Winright waiting on the doorstep, knocking her knuckles sore, calling for any help, praying vainly—yes, vainly.

She stepped back a pace from the doorstep, and glanced up. The windows were all black. She turned and ran down the walk. She could not wait. She must keep moving. She ran on up the road. She must get to Carruthers'—Carruthers'—

It was a few minutes' walk on a summer day, but now, toward midnight, in the pouring rain and the darkness, it seemed miles strung endlessly on miles. With each step the girl felt her strength failing, and yet tenaciously she kept on—on—on—every minute picturing to herself what must happen if she did fail, if help did not get to Nick Ross before the rising waters reached him.

She staggered in at the gate. In an upstairs window she glimpsed a light. Wildly she beat upon the door, and called out at the top of her voice.

She could not wait. She kept on knocking and calling. At length the faint light upstairs shifted, and then came slow footsteps. Still she beat at the door.

It was flung open. The farmer stood there, in pajamas, lamp in hand, staring at the bedraggled girl.

"Good God!" he cried. "Wife, come here. It's Laura Winright. Come in, girl. How d'you get here?"

"No, no," she cried. "I can't come in. I must get back." Already she was edging away. "Come right down to the gully. There—there's a man dying—the —"

"Just wait a minute," commanded the farmer. "Just minute—"

But Laura, frantic, refused to wait. Breathing hard, she went running back along the muddy road. Would they think to telephone a doctor? Why hadn't she thought? It was too late, now—she must get there before those terrifying waters reached Ross. She must get back and help him up.

She went stumbling down the steep declivity, calling to him with every step. She fancied, suddenly, an answering cry. She halted a moment, and shouted, then strained her ears; but there was no response save the cry of wind and rain.

Before she knew it, she was shivering knee deep in the creek. She gasped with the shock of the water, yet a moment later she breathed easier. It did not come above her knees.

She found herself beside him.

"Nick! Nick Ross!"

She leaned close.

"Nick Ross! Can you hear me?" But he lay still. She listened. Yes, he breathed. He was alive.

In frantic impulse she kissed him.

His eyes unclosed.

"Laura Winright!"

"Thank God!" she breathed.

He tried to pull himself up on his elbow; then, with a groan, collapsed.

"You're dying!" she cried, in affright.

He gripped her hands in his. Into her soul for the first time crept a hint of shame.

"You're all safe?" he questioned, anxiously.

"Yes, yes, but you—?"

She fancied his devil-may-care smile, though it was too dark to discern more than a white patch where his face was.

"Not more than three injuries are fatal. I'll survive the rest." Then, quickly, the laugh went out of his voice. Anxiety crept in, tense, terrible.

"Laura Winright, was it true?"

"What?" She felt herself flushing. She was glad he could not see her face.

"Is it true that you—that you kissed me?"

"I've got to get you out of here," she insisted. "Can you walk—*Ross?*"

"Is it true?"

"No, no," she protested, frantically.

"Oh, but it is."

"But you can't lie here in the rain—suffering—"

"Then answer me, girlie."

She did not. Again the reproachful thought came to her of what she might have done. She stumbled to the car, and, tugging desperately, staggered back at last under a load of cushions.

"Here! Let me lift your head." She tried to do as Glory did, and failed.

"That's dandy," he said. "I feel like a prince. And you did kiss me? It's glorious if it's true."

"Would they never come?" she wondered. She stared across the chasm, fancying lanterns, yet finding only darkness.

"No, no."

"But it *is* true. I know."

She flushed. She had sacrificed her womanliness for

a man who—oh, she hated him! So her thoughts jumped incoherently to and fro, always coming back to the cry, half-uttered, half-inarticulate: "Will they never, never come?"

"I know."

"You deceived me. You were shamming," she cried, angrily. "Then I did hear you calling when—when—"

"No, no, Laura Winright. I'll never tell a soul. It's my secret—yours and mine, and we'll keep it to ourselves." He was the old, devil-inspired, impudent, likeable Nick. She could not go on hating him.

Lightning lit the sky, the chasm, the wreckers of the car—yes, and lit Nick's face. She saw that, jest though he would, he was suffering.

"Nick!" She took his hand. All anger had melted; she knew now just what he had come to mean in her life.

She glanced up. On the distant slope she saw a flicker of yellow light. A loud "Halloo!" floated across the chasm.

"Here! Here!" she answered.

Then she leaned close.

"They're coming," she whispered.

"Yes."

"Nick."

Yes, it was for his sake she had sent Annisford away —for his sake, because of him, yet never knowing just what impulse moved her. She gasped. "Nick," she repeated.

"Halloo! Halloo!" came the call, now from the midst of the surging creek. "Miss Winright! Where are you?" The farmer waved his lantern, trying to light the uncertain way.

Laura did not answer him this time. She leaned close

She sensed rather than saw that Ross had flung himself backward in the seat.

"Steady, Miss Winright. Don't lean forward. The least weight may jar us loose."

Apprehension shot through her. The thrill of excitement gave place to sickening reaction. The intoxication of her speed-madness had gone, leaving her weak.

"There is probably no danger."

His tone was reassuring: but she knew that he had discerned in the darkness some peril she could not see.

"What is it?"

She strained her eyes into the night.

"No," he repeated, sternly, "do not lean forward. Sit back." He turned cautiously, and, reaching out his arm, snapped open the door beside her. "You must get down. I daren't leave this seat to help you."

She silently obeyed. Outside, she stood in drenching rain and inky darkness.

A flash of fire lit heavens and earth. Below her lay a gaping chasm, its depths black and fathomless. From it there loomed a skeleton framework of timbers swaying and creaking in the gale. The car hung on the edge of the stone-work, its front wheels dangling over the brink of the chasm.

"Oh!" she cried, shrilly; and, shrinking from the gaping maw beneath her, flung herself against the car.

She felt the car give. She was flung, sprawling, in the roadway. Above the dying roll of the thunder and the relentless swish of the rain came a terrible grinding and crashing.

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"He didn't cry out. Ross didn't," she told herself, hopefully. "If he'd fallen with the car he'd have shouted. He was just getting out; of course he's safe. Ross! Ross!" she called.

For the first time she was conscious that the rain had drenched her to the skin. She shivered, and wondered why Ross did not come, or call.

A lightning flash lit the desolate road. Laura saw, with horror, that she was alone.

Trembling, sick, she groped her way toward the edge of the abutment. She knelt as close as she dared, and stared into the shadowy gulf, trying to picture the scene below as she had known it in daylight. There was a wide, deep gully, through which a shallow creek trickled amid boulders; and, spanning it, the old, wooden bridge.

Plucking up hope, she shouted into the gulf, but there was no response.

Vaguely she remembered a precipitous footpath down the side of the gully to the edge of the creek. When next the lightning came her quick eyes found the path.

The next minute she went stumbling downward in

the darkness, slipping, sliding, clinging to the rank grass. At every flash she strained her eyes to pierce the depths.

Unexpectedly she felt her foot slip. She was falling. Instinctively she flung herself face downward on the steep bank, clinging with tenacious fingers to the long grass.

For a long moment she lay thus, her heart pounding, the rain beating violently upon her. Then, feeling her way cautiously, she once more found the path, and resumed her slow descent.

The next flash showed her the car, upturned.

"Ross! Hello, Ross!" she cried.

Ross did not answer.

"He's dead!" she groaned.

She forgot danger. No longer trying to pick her way, she stumbled, fell, rolled in a crushed heap among the stones. Bruised and sore, she presently found herself on her feet, and staggered blindly across the boulder-strewn level at the bottom of the gully.

She ran against the car. The impact hurled her back. The machine lay wrecked, its wheels in air. With anxious, trembling fingers Laura tore aside the curtains. She thought she saw Ross inside, crushed, dead, and uttered a little cry, and shrank away, with face averted.

Then, guided by another illuminating flash, she went stumbling over the stones.

"Nick!" she cried, and knelt beside him where he lay, silent, insensible.

With nervous fingers she loosed his collar, tore open his shirt. She listened, anxiously, and, hearing nothing, bowed her head with a choking cry. Then, wildly, she started up.

"He's alive!" she gasped. "He's alive!" Scarcely knowing what she did, she knelt again, chafing his cold hands.

He could not lie there. She must do something.

What, she did not know. Her impetuosity ran far ahead of her reason. She tried to gather him in her arms, to carry him; and sank in a moment, panting, exhausted, with her heavy load.

Ross groaned.

The drenching rain was reviving him, but she did not know it. The groan terrified her anew. She became suddenly conscious that she was standing in water. The creek, swollen by the rain, was slowly rising about the boulders. Panic-stricken, the girl shouted again and again for help; but there was no answer.

In her desperation she tried to think collectively. She must leave Ross here. She could not carry him. She must go for help. There was a house just a few steps past the bridge, on the further side of the creek. Carruthers' was still further, but she could not go that far.

She gave the chauffeur one last glance. The waters surely could not rise that far in the few minutes she would be gone. "I'll be right back," she whispered into his unheeding ears.

Then she went running over the stones, across the uneven creek bed, stumbling, falling, but ever running on. She came to a shallow, foaming torrent. She plunged in, above her ankles, above her knees. The chill of the water, colder than the rain, made her cry out, and the slippery rock gave uncertain footing. She went resolutely on. She must get help; she must get help at once. All other things were blotted out of her mind.

She found herself, how she never knew, painfully dragging herself up the further bank.

"It's only a step," she told herself, "only a step past the crest." Yet it was a long time—it seemed an endless time—before, slipping and falling and trying again, she gained the crest. She glanced back upon the gully, gaping blackly behind her; then, in sheer terror of the

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She stepped back a pace from the doorstep, and glanced up. The windows were all black. She turned and ran down the walk. She could not wait. She must keep moving. She ran on up the road. She must get to Carruthers'—Carruthers'—

It was a few minutes' walk on a summer day, but now, toward midnight, in the pouring rain and the darkness, it seemed miles strung endlessly on miles. With each step the girl felt her strength failing, and yet tenaciously she kept on—on—on—every minute picturing to herself what must happen if she did fail, if help did not get to Nick Ross before the rising waters reached him.

She staggered in at the gate. In an upstairs window she glimpsed a light. Wildly she beat upon the door, and called out at the top of her voice.

She could not wait. She kept on knocking and calling. At length the faint light upstairs shifted, and then came slow footsteps. Still she beat at the door.

It was flung open. The farmer stood there, in pajamas, lamp in hand, staring at the bedraggled girl.

"Good God!" he cried. "Wife, come here. It's Laura Winright. Come in, girl. How d'you get here?"

"No, no," she cried. "I can't come in. I must get back." Already she was edging away. "Come right down to the gully. There—there's a man dying—the bar—"

"Just wait a minute," commanded the farmer. "Just a minute—"

But Laura, frantic, refused to wait. Breathing hard, she went running back along the muddy road. Would they think to telephone a doctor? Why hadn't she thought? It was too late, now—she must get there before those terrifying waters reached Ross. She must get back and help him up.

She went stumbling down the steep declivity, calling to him with every step. She fancied, suddenly, an answering cry. She halted a moment, and shouted, then strained her ears; but there was no response save the cry of wind and rain.

Before she knew it, she was shivering knee deep in the creek. She gasped with the shock of the water, yet a moment later she breathed easier. It did not come above her knees.

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"Nick! Nick Ross!"

She leaned close.

"Nick Ross! Can you hear me?" But he lay still. She listened. Yes, he breathed. He was alive.

In frantic impulse she kissed him.

His eyes unclosed.

"Laura Winright!"

"Thank God!" she breathed.

He tried to pull himself up on his elbow; then, with a groan, collapsed.

"You're dying!" she cried, in affright.

to the fallen man. "Nick," she repeated, and his arms closed about her, and her lips met his.

"Now," he said, in mockery, "that settles all disputes."

She struggled to her feet.

"Here!" she cried.

Laura Winright sat by the cheerful wood-fire in the Carruthers' dining room, clad in a grey wrapper built for the buxom housewife, her feet encased in slippers many sizes too large. She waited, anxiously.

Farmer Carruthers came presently.

"I guess he'll be all right. We made him as comfortable as we could, and he's gone off to sleep. Anyway, the doctor can't get here for hours. There's nothing to do but wait."

Laura Winright rocked nervously to and fro. Suddenly she halted, staring, wide-eyed, at the farmer.

For the first time since the car crashed into the gully she remembered her mission.

"And the man?" she demanded. "Thad Smith? I have to see him. How is he? Where is he?"

She pelted the bewildered farmer with incoherent questions.

"Thad Smith?" he muttered. "Thad Smith? Thad Smith?"

"Where's Mr. Burnville?"

"Burnville?"

The farmer was stupid. Laura Winright looked and voiced her impatience.

"Mr. Burnville. He's here, isn't he? Why, of course," she hurried on. "He telephoned from here this afternoon." She gasped, already a suspicion forcing itself on her. "You don't mean—there's a hired man here named Thad Smith, isn't there? Or Andrew Webster?

And Mr. Burnville found him ill here, and telephoned this afternoon for me—"

Slow-witted Carruthers found no answer; but the red-cheeked housewife, quicker of ear and mind, came down in time to catch the question.

"No," she returned, quickly. "I never heard tell of any Thad Smith, or Andrew Webster, or any Burnville, either. They've certainly not been here."

Laura Winright, dazed, still blurted frantic, incoherent questions. Her mind, never orderly, could not seem to work. Burnville—she must get Burnville—but Burnville had gone to Nile. Would he be back? She ran to the telephone and, after frantic calling, got Burnville's hotel in town.

He had not come back.

The farmer and his wife watched and listened in bewilderment. To them the girl's frantic telephoning, her incoherent questions, her excited manner, told of shock and presaged illness. But her mind began to grasp the meaning of it all. The messages to herself, to Burnville, had been all part of a trick, to lure them away from Castle Sunset on Mrs. MacTurk's night out. The old house was quite unguarded.

She thought a moment, trying to steady her frayed nerves. The Maitland Port police? She shrank from publicity, yet—yet—she stood undecided, while in her ear Central clamoured:

"Number! Number!"

"Glory Adair!" thought Laura, with relief. She called the Barracks. Glory was not there. She might be back that night. So said a sleepy voice.

"Get her at once," commanded Laura Winright. "And tell her—tell her that she's needed—on a case—that—that Andrew Webster is ill at Castle Sunset."

CHAPTER XIV

THE INTERRUPTED SEARCH

When Glory Adair left Castle Sunset, she had by no means left the Winright case behind her. The message Burnville received just before her departure had jolted her. But not violently: if Burnville had found the man, she told herself, Burnville himself was due to be jolted.

He was not the sort of man Burnville was looking for. Her palmistry told her that; and her palmistry could not lie.

These many days she herself had been busy on a single line of determined enquiry.

She was tracking an individual Burnville had apparently overlooked—the young man Ross had seen leaving Castle Sunset the night of the supposed murder. Only the chauffeur had seen that man. Only the chauffeur had testified to his existence. The chauffeur might have imagined him; might even have invented him. If so, Nick Ross himself might be worth investigating.

Just now, however, Glory felt decidedly weary of the puzzle. She realized the need of relaxation. So she went straight to the Maitland Port hospital, where she fraternized with the nurses and picked up some technical detail regarding several interesting cases. One especially interesting patient was expected to cash in at any moment. Glory was placidly waiting for him to do so when the storm broke.

The storm cleared the air, and the patient rallied. "He's actually better!" mused the disappointed watcher.

She sat beside the special in attendance, studying the man's hand. "Good constitution, no bad habits and a stubborn disposition—good combination, that. He will recover. I'm simply wasting my time here." But she had to wait till the storm was over.

By then it was well past midnight. Glory set out for the Barracks, otherwise known as the Nurse's Registry, on the opposite side of town. All along her way was wreckage of the storm. She felt curious enough to take a census of the damage. Darkness had no terrors for her; wicked prowlers did not enter her scheme of life. She was somewhat of a prowler herself, cautious, silent, like a cat, and, like a cat, able to see in the dark.

Straying curiously up one street and down another, peering at flattened fences and uprooted trees and damaged street signs, she saw plenty of wreckage. She could not remember such another storm; its thoroughness, its sweeping, majestic power, delighted her.

She wished, now, she had been out in the storm.

Toward three o'clock Glory reached the Barracks. The sleepy nurse who had answered Laura Winright's call dozed over a book. She nodded to Glory, and went on dozing.

"Clara," said Glory, delightedly, "it was a superb storm. You never saw anything like it."

"Uh-huh!" returned Clara, and dozed on.

Glory turned in, and went to sleep.

The next thing she knew, Clara was shaking her back into wakefulness.

"There's a message for you," she shrilled. "I forgot all about it. Came at eleven o'clock. Wake up!"

"I am awake!"

She was, and dressing.

"Miss Winright called at eleven. She asked for you. She said to tell you—to tell you you were needed on a

case—that Andrew Webster is awful sick at Castle Sunset."

"Is he?" said Miss Adair, nonchalantly. "Maybe he's dead by now."

So they had found the man in grey, and brought him to Castle Sunset? Why to Castle Sunset? puzzled Glory Adair. Why not to jail, or even to the hospital? Why should Laura Winright house her father's murderer in her own house? So the nurse mused, rummaging her dresser drawers. She discarded a little revolver, and took up her portfolio.

"She called from out in Colborne," put in Clara.

"At eleven o'clock?"

"Yes."

"And from Colborne?"

"Why not?"

"Why not, indeed?" Glory Adair was wide awake. She dropped her nurse's outfit, and took up the revolver.

The message had been sent at eleven. It was now nearing four o'clock. If Andrew Webster had been at Castle Sunset when Laura telephoned, he would probably have accomplished his purpose long ago. If, however, Laura's message was merely surmise, the man in grey might still be there.

Glory hurried, in a serene, unflustered way.

Reaching Castle Sunset ten minutes later, she circumspectly reconnoitred. No light was visible. It was, she remembered, Mrs. MacTurk's night out. Andrew Webster, whoever he was, must have known that, too.

Then the telephone message from Nile was all a blind, to lure Burnville away. Her heart leapt.

She found the front door ajar, and stole into the hall. As she tip-toed along, the rooms to right and left were dark and empty. At the stair she hesitated: then passed on into the deeper darkness that led to the library.

In front of her glowed a distant, tiny, steady eye of light, only a few feet above the floor.

The light, she found, came through the keyhole. Glory, listening, heard a shuffling sound inside the Ghost Room. Softly she tried the door. The man inside had evidently locked it and removed the key.

Glory slipped her own key into the lock. She did not turn it. She had accomplished her purpose; now the man in grey could not unlock the door from the inside.

Then she went out upon the wide porch behind the house that looked down on the harbour, and the lake. The awesome depth, the gaping shadows on all sides, made her shiver, steady-nerved though she was.

She found her revolver, and followed the porch to the side of the house, where the French windows of the library opened toward the garage. She glanced at the upstairs windows of the garage. She had on other nights seen those windows alight at all hours. Now they were dark. Ross, too, was away! Of course—he had taken Laura Winright out to Colborne.

Glory discovered, now, why the light from the Ghost Room windows had not shown from the outside. The prowler, whoever he was, had closed all the inside shutters. Investigating more closely, however, Glory at last found a crack.

She put her eye to this.

The shelves had been swept clean. Books were heaped on the floor in great, irregular piles—books lying flat, on end, sprawling open. In the blaze of light everything showed clear. There came no sound save the quick flipping of pages and the plump! as a book was tossed aside.

A dark figure leaned between her and the light. She discerned a man. His clothes were grey. He wore a grey felt hat, pulled far forward. She fancied a grey

beard, ragged and untrimmed. She watched intently, hoping to glimpse his face. He sat now in profile.

Suddenly, flinging away a book, he stooped for another. His face turned toward her.

He was masked.

The nurse drew back. "He's alone," she mused. "He's hunting for something—he thinks it's hidden in the books—and—he hasn't found it!"

And he was the man in grey—Andrew Webster.

"The whole outfit's a disguise," Glory whispered, challenging the empty night.

She stepped back to the porch. The game was checkmate. The man in grey could not escape by the door; she could not enter by the windows, which were fastened on the inside. If she entered by the door, he could escape by the windows.

She dare not go for help. He might get away while she was gone.

Her only course was to wait.

Then she thought of the telephone. It was in the hall, just outside the library door.

She picked up a shawl lying on a porch rocker, and with it went to the telephone. She flung the shawl over her head, covering both herself and the instrument: then lifted the receiver. Quickly she called the town constable, gave her message, dropped the receiver, and threw aside the suffocating shawl.

"Flip! Flip! Flip! Plump! Flip! Flip!" Inside the library went on the sound, uninterrupted, of leaves turned and books cast aside. The shawl had safely muffled the telephone message.

Glory returned to guard outside the French windows. The door was safe. The constable should be there in ten minutes. The nurse perched herself on the porch rail. The job was done, quite neatly, too: she would

laugh at Burnville when he came back, empty-handed, from Nile.

The silence was jarred to fragments by the cacophonous jangle of the telephone.

Either the constable was stupidly calling for more information, or the man in grey had some confederate on watch to telephone a warning.

Glory slipped to her feet, and fingered her revolver. It was too late to reach the Ghost Room door and turn the key, unnoticed. She heard the man in grey rise softly, and steal across the room. He meant to answer the telephone himself.

She heard his key clicking as he tried to insert it in the lock. He kept on trying, manifestly puzzled to find the keyhole blocked.

She waited.

Again the telephone rang.

The man inside must know, by now. Glory glanced up and down the street. On the skyline was a hint of dawn, but no one seemed stirring. She moved swiftly, silently, toward her eye-hole in the shutters.

Simultaneously, shutters and windows flew open. Glory lifted her revolver and fired, point-blank. The man grappled her. They stumbled against the rail, and fell, wrestling in desperate silence.

She had no time to think. She clung gamely, seeking to hold him, he striving to free himself.

"Ross!" she cried. "Ross!"

But no Ross came.

The man's fingers tightened on her throat. He made never a sound. That struck her as odd—or was he choking her into unconsciousness. She tried to cry out, and could not. Still she held on. She would not, would not, would not let him go, she told herself.

The man's grip relaxed. She felt herself flung against

rising water, ran up the road, calling in vain hope of someone hearing her.

She turned into the first farm lane, and, shivering, stumbled to the door of the house. Impatiently she knocked again and again. She fancied people moving about. She heard ghostly noises within and without, the drip of the rain, the swish of branches.

"Oh, God, will they never come!" she groaned.

She could fancy the striking of the match, the lighting of lamps, slow-minded question and answer—and all the while Nick Ross dying down there in the gully, and Laura Winright waiting on the doorstep, knocking her knuckles sore, calling for any help, praying vainly—yes, vainly.

She stepped back a pace from the doorstep, and glanced up. The windows were all black. She turned and ran down the walk. She could not wait. She must keep moving. She ran on up the road. She must get to Carruthers'—Carruthers'—

It was a few minutes' walk on a summer day, but now, toward midnight, in the pouring rain and the darkness, it seemed miles strung endlessly on miles. With each step the girl felt her strength failing, and yet tenaciously she kept on—on—on—every minute picturing to herself what must happen if she did fail, if help did not get to Nick Ross before the rising waters reached him.

She staggered in at the gate. In an upstairs window she glimpsed a light. Wildly she beat upon the door, and called out at the top of her voice.

She could not wait. She kept on knocking and calling. At length the faint light upstairs shifted, and then came slow footsteps. Still she beat at the door.

It was flung open. The farmer stood there, in pajamas, lamp in hand, staring at the bedraggled girl.

"What is it?" he asked.

"The trail is lost."

"Lost? How?"

"Vanished into the earth." The nurse smiled queerly. "See! Here the foot-prints halt—break off! If I were skilled at woodcraft, I might follow broken twigs, but——"

In the very middle of the little clearing, the trail inexplicably ended. They closely examined the clearing on all four sides. Though from the upper side the foot-prints entered, nowhere did they leave.

"Where did that man go?" demanded Glory. "That is, if he is a man?"

"Did he take to the trees?"

Burnville glanced about. Glory examined the ground more intently.

"He sat down here. That means—come!"

She plunged into another path, but more cautiously, with searching glances to right and left. Perhaps ten yards of sinuous path they followed through dense cedars. Then, abruptly, she halted.

"There!" she exclaimed. "There is our quarry!"

"That brush pile!"

"Certainly."

Burnville commenced to pull aside the dead branches. Above, the morning light was widening. For the first time both man and woman sensed the oddity of their position. Glory daintily examined her revolver; then, impatient of Burnville's slowness, fell to work on the brush herself.

She uttered a cry.

"See!"

A grey coat-sleeve showed beneath the dead branches. An instant later Burnville dazedly drew forth a shabby

He gripped her hands in his. Into her soul for the first time crept a hint of shame.

"You're all safe?" he questioned, anxiously.

"Yes, yes, but you—?"

She fancied his devil-may-care smile, though it was too dark to discern more than a white patch where his face was.

"Not more than three injuries are fatal. I'll survive the rest." Then, quickly, the laugh went out of his voice. Anxiety crept in, tense, terrible.

"Laura Winright, was it true?"

"What?" She felt herself flushing. She was glad he could not see her face.

"Is it true that you—that you kissed me?"

"I've got to get you out of here," she insisted. "Can you walk—*Ross?*"

"Is it true?"

"No, no," she protested, frantically.

"Oh, but it is."

"But you can't lie here in the rain—suffering—"

"Then answer me, girlie."

She did not. Again the reproachful thought came to her of what she might have done. She stumbled to the car, and, tugging desperately, staggered back at last under a load of cushions.

"Here! Let me lift your head." She tried to do as Glory did, and failed.

"That's dandy," he said. "I feel like a prince. And you did kiss me? It's glorious if it's true."

"Would they never come?" she wondered. She stared across the chasm, fancying lanterns, yet finding only darkness.

"No, no."

"But it *is* true. I know."

She flushed. She had sacrificed her womanliness for

a man who—oh, she hated him! So her thoughts jumped incoherently to and fro, always coming back to the cry, half-uttered, half-inarticulate: "Will they never, never come?"

"I know."

"You deceived me. You were shamming," she cried, angrily. "Then I did hear you calling when—when—"

"No, no, Laura Winright. I'll never tell a soul. It's my secret—yours and mine, and we'll keep it to ourselves." He was the old, devil-inspired, impudent, likeable Nick. She could not go on hating him.

Lightning lit the sky, the chasm, the wreckers of the car—yes, and lit Nick's face. She saw that, jest though he would, he was suffering.

"Nick!" She took his hand. All anger had melted; she knew now just what he had come to mean in her life.

She glanced up. On the distant slope she saw a flicker of yellow light. A loud "Halloo!" floated across the chasm.

"Here! Here!" she answered.

Then she leaned close.

"They're coming," she whispered.

"Yes."

"Nick."

Yes, it was for his sake she had sent Annisford away —for his sake, because of him, yet never knowing just what impulse moved her. She gasped. "Nick," she repeated.

"Halloo! Halloo!" came the call, now from the midst of the surging creek. "Miss Winright! Where are you?" The farmer waved his lantern, trying to light the uncertain way.

Laura did not answer him this time. She leaned close

to the fallen man. "Nick," she repeated, and his arms closed about her, and her lips met his.

"Now," he said, in mockery, "that settles all disputes."

She struggled to her feet.

"Here!" she cried.

Laura Winright sat by the cheerful wood-fire in the Carruthers' dining room, clad in a grey wrapper built for the buxom housewife, her feet encased in slippers many sizes too large. She waited, anxiously.

Farmer Carruthers came presently.

"I guess he'll be all right. We made him as comfortable as we could, and he's gone off to sleep. Anyway, the doctor can't get here for hours. There's nothing to do but wait."

Laura Winright rocked nervously to and fro. Suddenly she halted, staring, wide-eyed, at the farmer.

For the first time since the car crashed into the gully she remembered her mission.

"And the man?" she demanded. "Thad Smith? I have to see him. How is he? Where is he?"

She pelted the bewildered farmer with incoherent questions.

"Thad Smith?" he muttered. "Thad Smith? Thad Smith?"

"Where's Mr. Burnville?"

"Burnville?"

The farmer was stupid. Laura Winright looked and voiced her impatience.

"Mr. Burnville. He's here, isn't he? Why, of course," she hurried on. "He telephoned from here this afternoon." She gasped, already a suspicion forcing itself on her. "You don't mean—there's a hired man here named Thad Smith, isn't there? Or Andrew Webster?

And Mr. Burnville found him ill here, and telephoned this afternoon for me—"

Slow-witted Carruthers found no answer; but the red-cheeked housewife, quicker of ear and mind, came down in time to catch the question.

"No," she returned, quickly. "I never heard tell of any Thad Smith, or Andrew Webster, or any Burnville, either. They've certainly not been here."

Laura Winright, dazed, still blurted frantic, incoherent questions. Her mind, never orderly, could not seem to work. Burnville—she must get Burnville—but Burnville had gone to Nile. Would he be back? She ran to the telephone and, after frantic calling, got Burnville's hotel in town.

He had not come back.

The farmer and his wife watched and listened in bewilderment. To them the girl's frantic telephoning, her incoherent questions, her excited manner, told of shock and presaged illness. But her mind began to grasp the meaning of it all. The messages to herself, to Burnville, had been all part of a trick, to lure them away from Castle Sunset on Mrs. MacTurk's night out. The old house was quite unguarded.

She thought a moment, trying to steady her frayed nerves. The Maitland Port police? She shrank from publicity, yet—yet—she stood undecided, while in her ear Central clamoured:

"Number! Number!"

"Glory Adair!" thought Laura, with relief. She called the Barracks. Glory was not there. She might be back that night. So said a sleepy voice.

"Get her at once," commanded Laura Winright. "And tell her—tell her that she's needed—on a case—that—that Andrew Webster is ill at Castle Sunset."

CHAPTER XIV

THE INTERRUPTED SEARCH

When Glory Adair left Castle Sunset, she had by no means left the Winright case behind her. The message Burnville received just before her departure had jolted her. But not violently: if Burnville had found the man, she told herself, Burnville himself was due to be jolted.

He was not the sort of man Burnville was looking for. Her palmistry told her that; and her palmistry could not lie.

These many days she herself had been busy on a single line of determined enquiry.

She was tracking an individual Burnville had apparently overlooked—the young man Ross had seen leaving Castle Sunset the night of the supposed murder. Only the chauffeur had seen that man. Only the chauffeur had testified to his existence. The chauffeur might have imagined him; might even have invented him. If so, Nick Ross himself might be worth investigating.

Just now, however, Glory felt decidedly weary of the puzzle. She realized the need of relaxation. So she went straight to the Maitland Port hospital, where she fraternized with the nurses and picked up some technical detail regarding several interesting cases. One especially interesting patient was expected to cash in at any moment. Glory was placidly waiting for him to do so when the storm broke.

The storm cleared the air, and the patient rallied. "He's actually better!" mused the disappointed watcher.

She sat beside the special in attendance, studying the man's hand. "Good constitution, no bad habits and a stubborn disposition—good combination, that. He will recover. I'm simply wasting my time here." But she had to wait till the storm was over.

By then it was well past midnight. Glory set out for the Barracks, otherwise known as the Nurse's Registry, on the opposite side of town. All along her way was wreckage of the storm. She felt curious enough to take a census of the damage. Darkness had no terrors for her; wicked prowlers did not enter her scheme of life. She was somewhat of a prowler herself, cautious, silent, like a cat, and, like a cat, able to see in the dark.

Straying curiously up one street and down another, peering at flattened fences and uprooted trees and damaged street signs, she saw plenty of wreckage. She could not remember such another storm; its thoroughness, its sweeping, majestic power, delighted her.

She wished, now, she had been out in the storm.

Toward three o'clock Glory reached the Barracks. The sleepy nurse who had answered Laura Winright's call dozed over a book. She nodded to Glory, and went on dozing.

"Clara," said Glory, delightedly, "it was a superb storm. You never saw anything like it."

"Uh-huh!" returned Clara, and dozed on.

Glory turned in, and went to sleep.

The next thing she knew, Clara was shaking her back into wakefulness.

"There's a message for you," she shrilled. "I forgot all about it. Came at eleven o'clock. Wake up!"

"I am awake!"

She was, and dressing.

"Miss Winright called at eleven. She asked for you. She said to tell you—to tell you you were needed on a

"Can you repeat the exact wording of that letter?"

Laura Winright knitted her brows.

"Just this line, Tom Winright, to say good-bye. I'm safe beyond your reach and that of your hired dettectives. I got what I was after and you won't see me again."

She paused.

"Did you notice one significant word?"

"What word?"

"Dettectives—spelt with two t's."

Laura stared.

"It is significant, you mean, because it's misspelled?"

"Perhaps—but chiefly because originally only four persons in Maitland Port knew that Harry Burnville came here as a detective."

Laura started. Glory Adair, Tom Winright, Harry Burnville—they were always seeing things she could not see. And they were the three others who from the first had known Burnville's true status.

"There is a fifth, evidently—the man in grey?"

"And the inference——?"

"One of these four persons disclosed the truth; or the servants overheard us; or——"

"Or Andrew Webster himself was listening?"

Laura cast a whitening look of apprehension at the heavy curtains. The quizzical brown eyes showed elation; such elation as Glory Adair, a little girl, might have felt in presenting to a playmate a complicated puzzle she had solved herself.

Then she pondered, rocking.

What she meant to say came hard, even to her. Yet Laura Winright, for her own sake, must be prepared for things still harder. She deliberated, till Laura's wondering look grew compellingly intent.

"Laura?"

"Yes?" Laura leaned close.

The telephone intervened. Glory placidly answered it.

"No. I can't do anything. My dear Miss Sifton, it's out of my line entirely. . . . I'm exceedingly sorry—he was such a nice old dog, too—I like dogs. . . . But I'd be totally out of place—really, I think a veterinary. . . ."

A moment's silence.

"Yes."

Silence again.

"I really think it would be nicer—probably a little strychnine—oh, I have strychnine handy but—now, really, I'd rather you'd get Jack to do it. . . ."

Laura Winright listened impatiently to the protracted argument. Miss Adair at last managed to break away.

"Old Rover Sifton is dying. Poor Fanny offered me anything under the sun if I'd only cure him. She offered me fifty dollars a week to nurse him for her. Laura Winright, is there a human would offer me that much for nursing another human! The disease is incurable. I told her so. It's old age. She gave me every symptom—and—and then she wanted me to come over and give him something to put him out of his misery."

Her smile faded.

"You were going to say——?" insisted Laura.

"Oh, yes. I was going to say—Laura, why didn't you tell me that your father and mother were—divorced?"

A moment Laura sat in stunned silence: then anger surged through her.

"Why? Because they were not!" Her blue eyes filled.

Glory had thought she sensed how Laura Winright would feel; a glance at the girl's face, troubled, pain-drawn, gave her a new idea of the heights of Laura's passionate idealism. Divorce had no place in her scheme of things. She saw in her long-dead mother a loving wife: in her austere father a loyal husband. "Are there

still girls like that?" mused the nurse; and stayed incredulous, unwilling to believe her eyes.

She had seen much of the sordid, sorrowing, selfish side of life. Yet quickly enough she realized that Laura's attitude toward the mere suggestion of divorce was a logical outcome of her training under a stiff old Scotswoman, and her quiet, contemplative life.

"There, there, I'm sorry, dear," she soothed. "Forgive me, won't you?"

Laura checked her sobs.

"You are so sudden, Glory. I never know what you are going to say. I don't know much of my mother," she went on, soberly, "and all I know, I've told you."

Again tears blurred her vision.

"My mother—my mother was a good woman!"

"I know, dear. I'm not blaming your mother."

Laura stiffened, angrily.

"Then—then—it's dad——"

"Stop and think, Laura." The nurse, for all her zephyry voice, was taking her patient firmly in hand. "What did those letters say—the letters Mr. Burnville found? The past, wasn't it? Isn't there a chance that in trying to find out what happened that night and why it happened, you might learn things that would hurt?"

Laura's face clouded. Yet her lips formed a thin line.

"Glory. I—I must find out." Glory heard the resolute intaking of the girl's breath.

"Did you ever see your mother's picture?"

Laura stared in affright.

"I know the answer, dear." The nurse was all tenderness now. "You needn't tell me."

"But who—who told you?"

"Your father's hand, dear—and your father's hand can't lie."

"You may have read it wrong?"

"Oh, I may." She sighed resignedly. Apparently there was no convincing this pertinacious, blue-eyed idealist of the truth of palmistry. "When we raked over these books,"—she crossed to the shelves—"you found nothing and Mr. Burnville found nothing, but I found a very interesting old volume that seems worth looking into."

Laura rose.

"I suppose you'll read all afternoon."

"Sit down. I may want to read this aloud."

She returned to her rocker with a thick quarto bound in black morocco. Laura glanced curiously at the title.

"Greek!"

"Thucydides," explained the nurse, "a famous Greek historian who was also an indifferent general. This was printed"—she turned to the title page—"at Leipzig in 1785. Very good." She placidly turned a few sheets. "Notice the substantial binding. This paper is yellow with age. Heft the book, will you?"

Laura did so.

"Why?"

"Shake it."

"It's hollow!"

"A good book converted into a clever dummy. If I had come a half hour later that morning, the man in grey would have found it. If I hadn't found it immediately I returned from the chase, you or Mr. Burnville would have beaten me to it. Mr. Burnville won't find it, now. He keeps his secrets. Oh, well, I keep mine."

Opening the book, she fingered over a score of pages, pressed a spring in the back. A cover flew up.

"Maitland Port always pronounced Adam Winright a queer old stick. Just like him to turn a Greek book that

nobody would take from the shelves into a hiding place for—old letters!"

The big book, outwardly just like any other book only ten times more uninteresting, was a jewel case within, but crowded with yellow, faded letters, a few old photographs, a packet tied with faded ribbon. Glory handed the packet to Laura Winright. The girl, fingering it gingerly, almost instantly returned it unexamined. Miss Adair for her part searched each item very methodically. The loose letters were singularly old and yellow letters, plainly enough, from parents in the country to a young man in a big city.

"I have found nothing of date, since your father's marriage, approximately speaking," commented the nurse. She pursued her search. "No envelopes! That's too bad. But this letter begins, 'Dear Harry.'"

"Uncle Harold Winright, I daresay." To Laura, her father's elder brother had never been more than a hazy phantom.

"Was he ever married?"

"No. I asked Dad once, and he said Harold died a young man."

"Was there any hard feeling between him and your father?"

"None." Laura hesitated. "That is," she qualified, "Dad never told me of any."

The nurse laid aside the loose letters. "There is nothing to help us in these."

Beneath them were old photographs, including a few daguerreotypes. Laura, on tip-toe now, gazed expectantly over her friend's shoulder.

"That must be father when he was young. There is an enlargement of that in the living room. You've seen it, Glory? Yes, that's Father."

Glory requisitioned her microscope. "Oh, these pro-

fessional photographers!" she exclaimed. "They show just the back of the hand when"—her tone grew biting—"the palm might tell so much."

The next two photographs were of young men, evidently chums of Adam Winright. Miss Adair reached for the last. It was wrapped in tissue paper bound with a blue ribbon. With her handkerchief the nurse brushed away a faint film of dust; then, unwrapping the picture, turned it toward the light.

Laura, with a sharp cry, pressed her hands over her eyes.

"What's the matter, dear?"

"Oh, nothing!" the girl protested.

From the photograph gazed at them a girlish face, face of a young woman whose dark hair and piercing eyes hinted at southern blood. Even into the photograph the artist seemed to have injected a touch of charm; there was a quaint fascination in the alluring eyes and pouting lips.

"Isn't she pretty?" Laura was herself again.

"Did you ever see her?"

"No."

"Did your father ever tell you who she was?"

"N-no. I never knew the least thing about her till you found this photograph."

"Then she is not your mother?"

Laura made no answer. Through her microscope, Glory studied every detail of the picture. "Here," she remarked, "are initials—'L. M.'" She laid the photograph aside.

Laura Winright proffered the packet of letters.

"You didn't even untie them!"

"No. I—I——"

"This ribbon has been untied quite recently." Glory

thoughtfully pulled out the bow-knot. Within the packet something glistened jetty-black.

"Hair!" exclaimed Laura.

"A woman's hair." Glory's tone was reverent. "From the girl of the picture."

With unwonted emotion she laid the little wisps of hair beside the faded ribbon. She turned to the letters.

"A woman's writing. Love letters?" The writing was faint, and here and there illegible. The letters bore date nearly thirty years before. Laura, having read a few lines, drew back.

"Have we a right to read them, Glory?"

Glory studied the faded paper. "Dear Boy" was the only superscription. She turned the page. "Lucile," she murmured. "Just Lucile. A young girl with a foreign name. This is the girl of the picture—L. M.? And Lucile was your mother's name?"

Laura's lips twitched.

"I—I never knew." She tried hard to face the question. "But she could hardly be dark for—for father was rather dark, and I——"

She bent her golden head.

"Your mother should, logically, have been fair," reasoned the nurse. "So you don't want to read the letters? Well, they're none of my personal concern."

Gathering the letters together, she reached forth her hand for the faded ribbon. She seemed for the nonce a mere automaton, without feeling, without even a woman's most natural curiosity to delve into the most enchanting of all subjects, another woman's past. Laura smiled.

"That's right," she approved. "We won't read them." She had come to a chasm from whose brink she shrank.

Glory took up the ribbon.

Laura's face changed. She laid a faltering hand on the nurse's arm.

"Glory!"

"Yes." The brown-eyed girl laid the wisps of black hair amid the letters, and commenced to tie the ribbon.

"We must read them. I don't want to, but—but for Dad's sake——"

She halted, irresolute. Was it indeed for her father's sake that all this past must be laid bare? Then, relentlessly, the old determination gripped her. She was essentially a woman, with the woman's intentness on the one preconceived idea.

"I mean to find the man who was with Dad that night," she cried, in an outburst of self-justification. As, weak, faltering, she had nevertheless struggled even to the horror of gazing with questioning eyes on the lines of her father's dead hand, so now, weak, faltering, she stood determined to probe this matter to its blackest depths. "I intend to find that man."

Glory laid aside the ribbon.

The letters were many and, as time wore on, became more voluminous and more endearing. Chance references hinted of the New York of thirty years before. Yet after a lapse of years even the clearest allusions were uncertain.

"What a pity we haven't the envelopes!" exclaimed the nurse. "Boy—Garcon—Petit Ami——"

The letters covered some fourteen months; then abruptly ceased.

"What does that mean?" wondered Laura.

"A parting—or a marriage. From the tone of the letters I should say a marriage. See," added Glory, glancing inside the wrapper, "here is one more letter. If we had commenced with this, we might not have needed to even glance at the others."

The letter, dated two years later than the last they had just read, was in the same hand-writing. But the writing was no longer faint; firm, rather, and clear, as though the heat of some fierce feeling had burned each character into the page. Glory silently held it outspread. Laura stared without comprehension.

"Read it," she at last faltered. "I—I don't want to."

Glory read, in a low voice. Compared with the others, this letter was singularly curt and direct.

"Sir," it began, "Mr. Villard tells me that you have won your suit, and that in the sight of the law I am no longer your wife. I shall always be your wife in the sight of God—that you know. Mr. Villard tells me that my boy has been left to me, that I shall have charge of his upbringing. Rest assured, I shall teach him to carry out one sacred purpose, to which he will devote his life—the infliction of justice on his father and my husband.

"Justice, slow of foot, will take years to reach you; but by his hand it will be sure to seek you out and strike you down. No wealth you can win will ensure you peace, no doors can bar out the avenger, always you must be haunted by the thought of what is to come—punishment, inevitable, by the means you know, from your own flesh and blood."

The letter was signed, simply: "Lucile."

"And the date," remarked Miss Adair, sententiously, "is—let me see—1887—just twenty-eight years ago. Did your hand—and your father's—tell me the truth? How old are you, Laura Winright?"

Many moments passed before Laura, sobbing incoherently, could falter forth the answer:

"I—I am just twenty."

CHAPTER XVI

THE TWENTY-FIRST BURR

Laura gazed piteously at her friend. Glory with the supremest calm laid the wisp of jetty hair amid the yellowed letters; then bound the faded ribbon reverently about them, as though striving to tie the tiny bow in exactly the same crease.

"Glory!" sobbed Laura.

She heard the swish of skirts, she felt her friend's arms about her neck.

"It's all right, dear," whispered Glory.

Laura knew it was not all right. Her terrified soul visualized new possibilities. The threatening letters Harry Burnville had found, the detective's own chance suggestion regarding the past, had been merely hints of something she could not imagine, let alone feel or see. But here a black certainty menaced from her father's shadowed past.

"Oh, to think of it!" She put her hands over her eyes.

"Don't, dear. Tears won't alter facts."

Glory's practical words rang, nevertheless, with sympathy.

"What am I to do?" pleaded Laura.

"What is there to do?"

"It is awful to think of. And yet——"

"And yet——?"

In the silky voice was no hint of insistence or even of

curiosity; just a tale of patient willingness to wait eternally if need be for the answer.

"I must go on. I must send these papers to Mr. Burnville."

"To Mr. Burnville?"

"Certainly."

The brown-eyed girl leaned close. "Laura Winright, you must not forget . . . this is *my* case. Harry Burnville has his secrets. I have mine. I have found these papers. He has not."

Laura hugged her in a rapture of relief.

"You're an angel, Glory!"

"No, dear—not for some years to come. Just now I am merely a girl bold and bad enough to do her own thinking."

She took up the packet of letters, and stretched forth her hand for Thucydides. Laura interposed.

"There's something more."

"Yes. There is." The nurse thrust her hand into the dummy book. "Oh!" She made a wry face. "What's this?" She held up her forefinger, to which clung a tiny, hard burr covered with sharp-pointed spines.

With her free hand she inverted the box, spilling a heap of these little burrs upon the table.

"Seeds of some kind!" Laura drew closer to examine them. "Flowers, I suppose—some of Dad's favourite flowers. I wonder if they'd grow after all these years. It's queer he never planted them."

"Perhaps he did. Perhaps there were flowers from just such seeds growing around Castle Sunset when you were little. . . . Only sometimes there are flowers that never bloom, just as there are men and women that never. . . ."

With a pin she patiently worked to dislodge the burr from her finger. Its score of tiny spines, of needle

sharpness and invisibly barbed, clung tenaciously. Laura was struck by the nurse's unusual pallor. She reached forward to examine the burrs.

"Don't touch them!" cried Glory Adair.

That harsh note in her voice was odd. Laura pouted.

"Don't, I say."

Laura desisted. "Why?" she asked.

Glory Adair sat down, smiling, but queerly. She glanced at her wrist watch. Then she meditated. "No, don't touch those burrs," she repeated.

"Why?" protested Laura again, in a hurt tone.

Miss Adair did not answer. She drew from her bosom a tiny phial, and dabbed the almost imperceptible scratch on her finger with a transparent liquid.

"Peroxide," she explained. "I do not think it will be any use."

Her tone awed Laura. Yet it was not in the least shaken. The smile had not left her face.

"Have you that telegram?" the nurse asked.

"Yes."

"Let me have it, please."

She took it, and with the pin cautiously manœuvred one of the burrs across the yellow sheet till its spines rested on the faint pin-pricks. She nodded, yet said nothing. Then she secured from the nearest drawer a sheet of plain paper. Upon this, in the same cautious fashion, she placed another burr. She folded the paper over; then unfolded it, and pushed the burr aside.

Laura watched, with at last an inkling of what the performance meant.

"See," said the nurse, "the marks on this paper are almost identical with the marks on the telegram."

Laura flung her arms about her.

"Oh, Glory, Glory!" she sobbed.

Rising, she impetuously reached for the push-button.

"No," commanded Glory. "Sit down. You can't do any good. If my calculations are correct, I'll be dead in exactly five minutes." Again she glanced at her wrist watch.

"I'll call Doctor Chalmers."

"No. You'll sit and listen to me. I haven't time to fool with doctors. Chalmers can't help now. . . . Laura Winright, that's how your father died. The burr was enclosed in that telegram. It was put there by the man who signed for the telegram in the morning. To kill in ten minutes, the poison must spread through the system almost instantaneously. I could cauterize that scratch myself. It wouldn't help in the least, and I'd have a burned finger for you to look at when I lie in my coffin."

Laura Winright shuddered.

"Your father," pursued the nurse, "opened that telegram, never dreaming. As he opened it, the burr caught between his fingers. That explains the faint scratches you saw there. They killed him."

Again Miss Adair glanced at her watch. Now she was faintly puzzled.

"There's nineteen of those burrs," she said. "This one on the telegram makes twenty. And the one that killed your father——"

"Twenty-one?"

Laura Winright, hunched in the arm chair, with frozen horror watched the nurse's serene face.

"It's a funny world, isn't it, Laura?" Her tone was philosophical. "A rum old world. It's always the unexpected that happens. I rummage for your father's will, and I find—oh, an excuse for making mine." She laughed. "Now, listen——"

"Oh, don't, don't talk like that!"

"If I don't outlive the time-limit, you must find this

woman, Lucile. You can trace her through the lawyer, Villard. That's all, I think."

Rising, she paced nervously up and down.

"That poison," she exclaimed at last, "it isn't working."

She seemed disappointed, angry even, at this hitch in her calculations. Dubiously she eyed the wrist watch. Had she mistaken the time?

"There can't be any question. . . . Am I wrong about this thing? Entirely wrong?"

"Glory!"

Hope sprang into Laura's eyes.

"It's past ten minutes." Yes, the nurse was disappointed. "If I were right, I have no business to be alive. I've made a fool of myself—that's all. . . . And yet, those spines fit the telegram. There's no doubt of it. There can't be." She stared at the papers on the table. "If I'd only known, that day Mr. Burnville came——"

"Glory!"

"Quit hugging me, will you?" The nurse was deep in her puzzling problem. She was not concerned at all at her escape from the death she had fancied certain. She eyed the heap of burrs. "I could try them all but that would take me nearly three hours. I haven't time for that."

She still was haunted by the ten-minute time-limit.

Then she laughed, happily.

"Kiss me, Laura. I'm not dead yet. I'm not going to die. . . . Again. . . . There, now, let up on the kissing."

She sat herself down once more to the intricate problem of the burrs.

"It could not be suicide. Your father would not commit suicide. His hand tells me that. . . . Then, if he had killed himself, what business have those marks on the

telegram? Suicide is impossible. That's plain. But the burr? Who but your father knew of the existence of these burrs, and which were poisoned and which were not?"

Laura shivered. "That man."

"The man in grey?"

"Yes."

"He did not know of this book. Otherwise, he'd have found it at once . . . searched it . . . when he raided the Ghost Room."

That, too, was evident. Miss Adair resumed her restless pacing.

"But where did the burr go? The burr that killed your father?" She made a restless circuit of the room. "If I'd only known that day——"

"It's probably been swept out long ago."

"You think it would fall on the floor?"

Glory sat down again. Silently she conjured up the lines of Adam Winright's hand.

"No. Your father was an orderly man. The burr was dangerous. He would put it out of harm's way, if he could. First, he telephoned Chalmers. Then, he destroyed the burr. Then he returned to the table."

She had risen, glancing about the room. She knelt now before the fire-place.

"The fire was low that night when you came. It has not been lit since." With the poker she stirred the ashes. Then she pulled out the ash-pan, raising a cloud of dust which set Laura coughing. "It must be here," she said. "It's the one thing he'd do. His hand tells me so."

Laura almost smiled at her friend's unshakeable faith in what Adam Winright's hand told her.

"Perhaps——" she began.

But Glory had risen, her eyes shining.

"I've got it!"

On the table top she dumped from the flat poker tip a little pile of ashes and in their midst the twenty-first burr.

"I knew it must be there!" she triumphed.

Again the puzzled look crept into her eyes. "One can't be too sure. It is one thing to believe and another to positively know."

She eyed the burr. Thoughtfully she dabbed her finger again with peroxide.

"It might pass off with a slight sensation, if I use the peroxide first," she commented, coolly.

Laura restrained her.

"Glory! You'll kill yourself."

"But how am I to know for certain that it *is* poisoned? The entire case turns on that. If I assume that it's poisoned, I may be pursuing a delusion. If I *know* that it's poisoned, I'm on the trail of facts." She went on dabbing.

"Don't!" pleaded Laura.

The nurse laid down the phial.

"How am I to know?" she insisted, almost crossly.

"A cat? Or a rabbit?"

Glory started up.

"I have it!"

She went tripping to the telephone. Laura heard her gay voice filter through the doorway.

"Is that you, Miss Sifton? I've been thinking over what you asked me. Poor old Rover! He's better, surely? . . . No? Now, that's too bad! Can you bring him over? I'll do one thing or the other—and I'll know at a glance."

She returned to Laura. "We'll know in a few minutes." She was unexcited. "Let's go out on the lake porch, where no one will see us."

She brushed the twenty burrs into the dummy Thucy-

dides, replaced the packet of yellow letters, the loose papers and the photographs, snapped shut the catch, put the book back on the shelf.

"It looks like every book," she commented, "but immensely more uninteresting."

The twenty-first burr, now, was safe in the locket she wore. She busied herself a moment with her little portfolio, and shook some white powder into a paper, which she folded. Then she pulled on a pair of kid gloves. After which she found a cosy rocker on the lake porch, and a magazine.

Laura's blue eyes were deeply troubled.

"It frightens me, Glory. Oh, it frightens me. I don't know why, but—it's all so strange, so terrible!"

"Terrible? A divorce? Why, you little innocent, everybody's doing it, nowadays. Then it gives us the motive—a vendetta. And a suspect—the son."

"His own son?" Her eyes widened. "Tom?"

"Of course not. Tom is just twenty-four. This letter was written twenty-eight years ago."

Laura sat in silence, crushed by the awesome suddenness of it all, too bewildered to comprehend it more than half, seeing as through shadows a dark-faced man meeting her father in the Ghost Room at nights, threatening him, and, at last, striking at him in this cruel, treacherous, unthinkable way.

"His own son?" she at last repeated.

So she still sat, staring into her own visioned thoughts, when Fanny Sifton came. Her chauffeur followed, half-dragging, half-carrying the aged setter, whose wheezy gasps were discernible before they rounded the turn in the porch. Laura was too shaken to greet Miss Sifton composedly; she only half heard the nurse's purrings of sympathy.

"Poor old Rover! Poor old Rover!"

The animal was plainly dying. Its wheezy breath came in pathetic gasps. The others watched while Glory stroked it. The animal's tender brown eyes searched her face.

"Poor old Rover!"

Miss Sifton, with a choking sound, tried her glasses at first one angle, then another.

"He can't live?" urged the nurse. "Is it really necessary, though——?"

Laura wondered.

"It hurts me to see him suffer." Miss Sifton had removed her glasses in order to see at all.

Glory thoughtfully opened the locket. She unfolded the paper containing the white powder.

The dog licked her caressing hand. She tossed a pinch of powder on his red tongue; then, casting away the rest, with her gloved hand continued to stroke his hair. His sad eyes were trustful. The nurse shivered, as though the June breeze were chill.

"Here is a case where it is kind to be cruel—cruel to be kind." She seemed arguing with unsuspected emotions. "Poor dog, he trusts me."

Little Miss Sifton watched, wide-eyed with horror of the impending tragedy.

The nurse looked at her wrist-watch. The faint ticking projected itself noisily into the silence.

The animal's gaspings abruptly ceased. Its soft eyes brightened into sudden animation. Its tail wagged briskly, and it made as though to stand up. Miss Sifton's look grew hopeful. The dog's breath came soft and steady.

"He's better!" exclaimed Miss Sifton. "Oh, Miss Adair, was it medicine after all?"

"Good medicine." The nurse resumed her stroking.

The dog lay down, comfortably, still watching Glory's fair face. The nurse, puzzled, questioned her wrist-watch.

Rover shivered and stiffened. Miss Sifton uttered a faint cry, and commenced sobbing into her handkerchief.

Glory nodded calmly to the chauffeur.

He gathered the dead animal up. Laura, after they had gone, returned to the porch. She found the nurse gazing meditatively down upon Lake Huron.

"I like this view," she remarked, pensively. "There's something wide about it, the great lake, the river valley. It's wonderful to me. But, Laura Winright, it's nothing to you—you, who have seen New York."

Laura turned on her, impatiently.

"Why did you use that powder? Why not the burr?"

"That powder?" Glory laughed, lazily. "That was powdered sugar. The sugar was for Miss Sifton, to distract her attention. Maybe it's a wise precaution not to let even Fanny Sifton see that I've found that burr." She held up her gloved finger, to which the burr still clung.

"Laura," she added, "it is now an absolute certainty. Between the time I gave that dog the powder and the time he stiffened out was exactly nine minutes."

CHAPTER XVII

THE UNKNOWN QUANTITY, *x*

Laura Winright's exceedingly tender conscience troubled her. Was she playing fair with Burnville? Burnville was working in her interest—did she not owe it to him to at once disclose what she had learned? Was she, in disregarding Burnville, playing fair with herself?

She protested to Glory.

"I can't leave Mr. Burnville to work in the dark!"

Glory's answer came like the snap of a whip.

"Let him find his own way to the light. We are competitors, Harry Burnville and I. We made our bargain. He has the advantage. He has practical experience; I have only theory. He has every agency the law can muster; I have only the wits of one poor Maitland Port nurse. He's keen and sharp and clever and he works like a dozen devils. In a race with him, every minute counts."

She referred to a railroad time-table.

"Pack your kit, dear," she added. "We march immediately."

Detroit was her destination. She was on the trail of Lawyer Villard. "It's our one chance," she told Laura. "You say, find this son. In a continent of a hundred millions, you're willing to search for a young man who, twenty-eight years ago, was possibly in New York, and whose name you don't know. Life is too short, dear. The mother's name we don't know; Lucile, perhaps Lucile Winright—who can tell? There just re-

mains the lawyer. Plaintiffs and defendants may come and go, but the lawyer stays and takes toll of both."

Study of recent law lists in the little town didn't help her. There was no Villard in the county lists, or, for that matter, in the Michigan lists of recent years. To Detroit therefore she went, hurrying Laura along with her.

"Never mind Nick Ross," she said. "He's recovering nicely."

"But——"

Laura stifled her objection this time. It concerned, not Nick Ross, but George Annisford. At the Winright stores, where they were sure to visit, she must meet him again, for the first time since she sent him away.

Throughout the railroad journey to Detroit, throughout the taxi ride to the stores, she felt a growing dread of the imminent encounter. She was actually trembling when she stepped from the elevator into the main offices on the fourth floor.

She hurried to Tom's den.

"He's out!" she exclaimed; then shivered at the sound, behind her, of a well-remembered footstep.

"Hello, Laura, girl!"

"George!" she breathed.

Oddly, she could think of nothing save rain and darkness, and Nick Ross, the chauffeur—just a chauffeur—pressing his lips to hers.

"George!" Her whisper held an appeal.

"By thunder, she knew me! Listen to that, Miss Adair. She recognized me." Gayly he chucked Laura under the chin. "Eh, chick? Come right in, girls. Tom, is it?" in response to Laura's question. "Oh, rot! I thought you were calling on me. So I'm not enough attraction to tug you away from your Huron sunsets, youngster?—it takes Big Brother to do that? Well, just

pitch your tents and feed the camels and I'll scout for Tom while the scouting's good."

He caught up the telephone receiver. Laura breathed easier. He was not hurt. He could laugh and jest. . . . And then, with a shock, she saw his lips faintly quiver, and discerned the wearily pleading look in his eyes.

It was just for an instant. Then he smiled. A moment he talked over the telephone.

"Tom will be here in fifteen minutes," he reported. "In the meantime——"

"In the meantime, Laura wants to look at the old account books—the very oldest," interposed Glory.

Laura wanted nothing of the kind. But she nodded.

"Queer, what some people will want. Make yourselves perfectly at home, though. The house is yours, clear of mortgage and taxes paid for ten years to come."

Annisford, absolutely uncurious, turned to his work. Then he swung his swivel chair and looked at Laura. She shrank.

"Say," he jested, "did you forget to punch the time-clock when you came in, kiddies?"

"The time clock?"

"At the elevator. If you're not on time, we dock you. If you come in and do office work without punching the clock, you don't get paid. That was your dad's idea, Laura. Even Tom and I have to do it. Every day there's a paper dial in there that records our comings and goings and malingerings. Great invention! Nick Ross would enjoy it." He rose. "I've got to chase a buyer down town, so I'll just leave you monarchs of all you survey, including the waste-basket and the elevator boy. Dig into the dust and debris of our doggone bygones, my dears."

He punched the derided time-clock. Laura, when she

heard the downward grinding of the elevator, breathed easier.

Glory was already at work. Turning over the old books, her quick eyes scanned column after column of entries, to the accompaniment of a stream of running comment and question.

"In his account books, a man tells the truth—usually. They throw more light on his character than a diary, if he keeps one, and no absolutely sane man keeps a diary." She turned a page. "Your father, Laura Winright, saved all this debris. Mr. Annisford would have used it to relieve the paper shortage. This book dates back to 1887. Do you know this hand-writing?"

"Dad's."

"Evidently, old Colonel Annisford, the bluff, jovial handshaker, was business-getter, while your father, the man with the orderly mind, kept the books. I've done a bit of probing in this direction already," she explained, to Laura's surprise. "I asked Mr. Annisford lots of questions. You could question him from now to Doomsday and he'd never catch on; he's so perfectly trustful. The business thirty years ago was very small—a two-man affair. It grew. Twenty-four years ago your father was taken into partnership. That's where those red-bound books were started. Here's the pay-roll of 1887, though. 'Adam Winright, $10'—there's the date. Only a couple of weeks after the Lucile Meloche letter. Laura, I'll be jiggered! We've a neat little mystery right here. Why did your father, apparently well-to-do before that time, come to work for Colonel Annisford at ten dollars a week?"

"He saw the future?" suggested Laura.

"Maybe"—drily.

She went on with her researches and her comments. The books showed a big expansion of business, a growing

pay-roll; and then, within a few years, the partnership began, and the new set of books. To Laura, the dry entries in the red-bound volumes had no interest, even in her father's early, half-formed yet familiar hand. But Glory's comments illuminated.

The nurse whistled.

"Good! Adam Winright, partnership account. That's dandy!" Her finger went down the column, almost like a flash, yet Laura knew that the nurse's keen eyes missed nothing.

"Just as I thought. The business paid each partner's living expenses, and debited the partner on the books. Nowadays, business men keep separate bank accounts to handle their private expenditures. More businesslike, of course."

She rapidly turned the pages.

"Look! Laura!" she exclaimed.

Laura read:

1888
Ap. 19 to remit hospital re Meloche $122.95

"Whose hand-writing?"

"Dad's."

They went on patiently searching for more items *re Meloche.*

Laura shivered at the name staring from the page in her father's well-remembered hand. The entry linked him more irretrievably with the foreign woman of the picture than had even the photograph and the old love letters.

There came, presently, an entry of money paid the Metropolitan Detective Agency, and charged to Adam Winright. Then came another, then more—half a dozen.

One entry specified "New York." Glory made careful note of all.

"Notice," she said, "your father, a rising business man, partner in a profitable concern, spends practically all his money this way. He draws only a few dollars for himself."

"There are no more entries re—re Meloche?"

"None," sighed Glory. "But—oh, see here——"

1890
Jun. 11 To cash paid you re X, $20.00

These payments ran along, monthly or oftener, increasing in amount from twenty to thirty and even forty dollars—all *re X*.

"Who is X?" demanded Glory.

"X"—Laura hesitated—"X is an unknown quantity."

"But human nature is a strange yet positive quantity. Your father's nature compelled him to keep exact record of expenditures and their purpose. Something else compelled him to disguise these entries so that he alone could understand their true significance. Hence, *re X*."

Laura thought of her ghostly pursuit of the man in grey, of the clothes found in the cache amid the cedars, of the slinking figure that so many had seen or fancied about the grounds of Castle Sunset, of the mysterious visitant at nights when her father had gone alone to his library. Yes, and of those menacing letters in her father's desk.

"It was blackmail?" she whispered.

Glory meditated.

"Anyone but Colonel Annisford would have been curious about such an entry. But the old Colonel, I daresay, was like George." She sighed. "He hated bookkeeping and office work. Adam Winright, who loved

such things, was a godsend. . . . Ah! Paid *Mrs. Winright*——"

"That," said Laura, "was my mother. Not the woman divorced." She gazed at Glory in triumph. "That was the fair-haired woman, my mother . . . Mary Winright. Yes, I do remember. Father did say her name was Mary."

Glory shrugged her shoulders.

The entries *re X* continued, side by side with the household allowances to the merchant's wife. Within less than a year the latter abruptly terminated. For two weeks there were entries in a strange hand.

"On what did your mother live then?" questioned Glory. "Love?"

Laura shivered. There was bewilderment in all this, with a hint of menace. Glory, turning the page, pointed to the last of the entries in the same strange hand:

"To paid funeral $200.00"

"That," she commented, "was—let me see—1892. Twenty-three years ago. How old is Tom?"

"Nearly twenty-three."

"And you—you are twenty?" She mused. "Is that the funeral of the sister I found in your hand?"

She traced the entries, day after day, week after week, month after month. Still there ran through them that same mysterious thread of payments "re X." Yet there never recurred any payment to Mrs. Winright.

"I can't understand it," muttered Laura. "Unless my mother had money of her own—a private account—or her accounts were charged separately—or——"

The accounts went on and on, till less than twenty years before. At that time came another significant entry:

1895.
Aug 2 To check for Maitland Port property—$4,500.00

"Castle Sunset!" exclaimed Laura.

Then followed remittances to Angus MacTurk; and paralleling them still, that haunting, sinuous trail of payments "re X."

Glory came to the last pages of the last book.

"Here," she exclaimed, "Re X, $8,000. That's a jump, from the purchase of X in small instalments. Evidently a final settlement, Laura, dear? There's not a trace more of X—is there?" She ran her finger carefully through the concluding entries. "Done!——slam!——"

She shut the last of the red-bound account books.

"It was then," she added, "the business was converted into a joint-stock company. Thereafter your father kept his private accounts in the books we have already seen at Castle Sunset—and X, whoever he or she was or whatever it was, doesn't appear there, my dear."

Laura's puzzled musings were interrupted by a gentle cough.

"Tom!"

He stood in the office doorway. Glory smiled, pleasantly.

"I was just waiting for you to speak, Mr. Winright."

Laura interposed, with an impulsive hug and a kiss. Tom's dignified gaze sought the pile of dusty books.

"What is this?"

Again Glory smiled.

"To settle a wager, Mr. Winright—if you like?"

Tom stayed unruffled by this evasion.

"May I make bold to doubt that, Miss Adair?"

She shrugged her shoulders. He drew a step nearer, his earnest eyes fixed on hers.

"Miss Adair, surely you know there's danger in stirring up such ancient dust. It might poison the tiniest scratch. If you wanted anything looked up, why not ask one of the office girls——"

"And imperil her life?"

"The value of lives is relative." Tom's tone was philosophic, his eyes were cold. "Laura's life—or yours, Miss Adair——"

The nurse laughed.

Laura caught Tom's arm. "Oh, tell me, Tom, where can I find Mr. Burnville?"

Tom searched his pockets, and found Mr. Burnville's card. "That's his office. He's not there. Last I heard he was in Buffalo. No, there's nothing doing." Drily he answered Laura's unspoken question.

Laura looked her disappointment.

"Sister mine," he added, dismally, "is this all a wild goose chase?"

"Oh, Tom! After that man—those letters——"

"Yes, yes," he mused. "There is that man, of course." Yet he seemed to doubt. He looked at Laura again, his manner palpably embarrassed. Laura felt surprise. It was unusual for Tom to be troubled.

"Oh, Laura," he exclaimed, "I nearly forgot to tell you. Be sure to see Airth, the lawyer, while you're in the city. He says he positively must see you about—well, it's about the estate."

Her eyes met his. In their steely depths Laura wonderingly fancied a hint of compassionate pity.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE MAN WHO COULD TELL EVERYTHING

After a day spent in car-riding, calls on lawyers, long distance telephoning, Glory Adair returned to Laura Winright.

"You stay in Detroit," she commanded.

"Where are you going?"

"If I knew, dear, I'd tell you. When I get there, wherever it is, I'll send word."

With this evasion Laura Winright had to rest satisfied.

She spent three days in a fever of impatience. The afternoon of the third day, a telegraph message was handed her:

"No law to prevent you coming straight to Grimsby, Canada."

Only when she was speeding through darkness across Canadian fields did Laura Winright recollect, that in those three impatient days she had failed to see the lawyer, Airth.

A very bewildered Laura Winright stepped down from the morning train at Grimsby. The faint lake breeze in her nostrils reminded her of Maitland Port, but, beneath the rising summer sun, the low land lay hot. In the background towered a grey height, tipped with a dissolving mist. A nondescript hackman at the other end of the station platform waited indifferently for his fare

to come to him. Laura hesitated, uncertain which way to turn.

Glory Adair came tripping briskly into the midst of her perplexities.

Laura ran to her.

"Have you found him, Glory? Did he tell you anything? Tell me all about it—right away!"

Glory smiled at her eagerness.

"Glory! Tell me!"

"First," returned Glory, "we will walk—*walk*," she emphasized for the dilatory hackman, now aroused, "just a few blocks to an hotel. There we make a dash for a brush. Cinders are pretty, but your yellow hair makes them look mussy. Dust is good—we're all made of dust—but it's wasted on a black background. Come, dear—I'll brighten you up."

She was relentless as the great rock of the Niagara Escarpment towering in the background. Laura, fuming impatiently, at the hotel resigned herself to brushing.

"What an amazing lot of peach trees!" she grumbled. "People here plant them in their front yards——"

"Yes," said Glory. "It's on account of those peach trees that we're in Grimsby to-day. They lured a young man named Villard——"

Laura's brows lifted.

"A *young* man?"

"Precisely."

"But the lawyer?"

"He died eighteen years ago. His son was also a lawyer. He had poor health and lots of money. He put the money into a peach farm for the sake of his health. He manicures and massages his orchard to the queen's taste, as they put it over here in Canada. I'll give you fifty dollars per for all the weeds you find there. It's

not young Mr. Villard we're to see, though, but his mother——"

"The lawyer's widow. Yes. What did she tell you, Glory?"

"Merely, that we might call. You see, I telephoned her last night, and naturally, I told her only what I thought wise, and she answered only what she deemed prudent."

"Then you haven't seen her?"

"No."

Laura's face as they left the hotel was shadowed, that Glory had no tale to tell. Yet—she doubted. She had come to see in Glory Adair more than the mere graduate nurse.

Glory answered the tacit question in her eyes.

"There was no Villard in the Detroit law lists, or in the Michigan lists, even of thirty years ago. But Mr. Airth let me see the old New York State lists. James Villard had practised at Niagara Falls, New York, and later at Buffalo. At Buffalo I found that James Villard himself was long since dead. His widow and son had expatriated themselves to Grimsby, as many Americans have done. I came here last night——"

"*After* you telegraphed me?"

"Yes, and telephoned Mrs. Villard, and gave Grimsby the once over. Notice, dear, we're passing from village to country. Note the improvement. The village looks like any village. This Stone Road, as the natives call it, is fairly metropolitan. Isn't it, now?"

Laura wasn't interested in the stone road, the fine country homes, the peach orchards, rank on rank of green trees orderly as soldiers on parade. She was wondering what the widow of Lawyer Villard would have to tell.

"That man," murmured Glory, "refused twenty thousand dollars for eight acres of peaches."

Laura's mind took in "eight dollars for twenty thousand acres of peaches"—and was not amazed! Only she asked herself: "Did Mrs. James Villard ever meet Lucile Meloche?"

"There's a pretty cottage!" she exclaimed, at last.

"Shall we go in?"

It was a grey-stone cottage, standing far back amid beds of brilliant flowers and a setting of green lawn. Laura Winright fancied it an old grey cat dozing with half-shut eyes on a bright-hued quilt.

A young man came sauntering down the walk. Involuntarily he tipped his hat; then flushed, noting the young women were strangers.

"Mr. Harry Villard, I believe?" questioned Glory.

"At your service." The dark eyes glowed. Mr. Harry Villard studied Glory's proffered card; and then he looked up and studied Glory, with a whimsical smile. "Miss—Gloria—Adair," he repeated. "My mother is expecting you, Miss Adair. Just come in, won't you? Is this your first visit to Grimsby?" He accepted a hurried introduction to Laura Winright; then, quite unconcerned, went on chatting with Miss Gloria Adair. He left them in the sitting room, and went to summon his mother.

Laura stared through the window at the bright-hued flowers.

"He seems very friendly"—bitingly—"toward you!"

"Was he?"

Glory's retort was checked by a rustle of silks. A woman stood in the archway, holding aside one of the heavy curtains. Laura, looking up, gazed into dark eyes that seemed to peer into her soul.

"Mrs. Villard—this is Miss Winright."

Laura rose, timidly.

Then the woman in the archway smiled. She spoke, "I'm so pleased to see you." Commonplace, nothing

more; yet the voice, though it seemed low, was queerly penetrating.

"How do you like Grimsby?" she added, as she sat down.

Laura's second impression of the woman quite contradicted the first. In the archway, holding aside the curtain, she had seemed young enough to be that boy's elder sister, and stern, and cold. Now, sitting close, she was gentle, kind, winning, submissively attentive to what Glory had to say.

"I am afraid," she murmured, "I shall be little able to help you, Miss Adair."

To impetuous Laura, her friend's appeal seemed weak.

"Please, Mrs. Villard," she broke in, "try hard—very hard—to remember. This is so important to us—to me, and to Brother Tom."

"So you have a brother—Tom—Tom Winright?" the woman whispered.

Laura hesitated now. It was one thing to encourage the woman to speak; another to ask questions that stirred up the mire of the past.

Glory's conscience was untroubled as her fair face.

"I didn't go into particulars over the telephone, did I? No, I just mentioned a case Mr. Villard had. Well, it was a divorce suit involving a couple named Winright. They were relatives of Miss Winright."

Laura thrilled with gratitude that her keener-minded friend threw over the exact relationship a protecting veil.

"It would be twenty-eight years ago, perhaps," pursued Glory. "Mr. Villard acted for the respondent, Mrs. Winright."

The dark-eyed woman pondered.

"Mrs. Lucile Winright," put in Laura.

Mrs. Villard turned to her.

"So, you, Miss Winright, are a relative of—of that Mr. Winright? Not his daughter, I know, but——"

Her question did not answer Glory's. Laura Winright noticed that. Her eyes searched the kindly, sympathetic face; then looked away, repentant of her momentary suspicions.

"You recollect the case, Mrs. Villard?" Glory's tone was actually eager.

The woman continued to gaze at Laura Winright.

"I do."

She seemed weighing the pros and cons of a vexed question.

"Not very distinctly," she added. "Not till several years after was I married to Mr. Villard. Still, regarding this case I know a little—a very little. Mr. Villard was then in Buffalo, and he had known the family, the Winrights, at Niagara Falls. What did you say was your father's name, Miss Winright?"

Laura told her.

"Adam Winright?"

The woman, repeating the name, seemed trying vainly to grope her way through the past.

She was clearly a lady, thought Laura. Perhaps that accounted for her stilted, almost awkward, way of talking, just as it did for her soft, penetrating tones. Yet the girl could not get this thought out of her mind: "This woman is feeling her way. She either does not know, or does not tell, all."

Again her eyes met the woman's, and again she looked away from the kindly face, ashamed of her suspicions.

"Adam Winright? Of the Winright family, Mr. Villard rarely spoke to me. He—always, he said that Winright, this Winright of the divorce case, was a black sheep. Yet perhaps he was not all wrong. A good boy, only a

bit reckless—and women are so impatient, and expect so much!"

Her tone had a touch of harshness for the dim Lucile, the too impatient Lucile, of long ago.

"They expect too much. Though I think," she went on, "he loved her, and I know she loved him."

"Could you tell us the particulars of the case?" Practical Glory spoke.

"No."

"Anything of the wife? The woman divorced?"

"She was, I think, a sort of actress." Mrs. Villard seemed sniffing contempt of actresses. "And a foreigner. Yes, her name was Lucile—Lucile Meloche."

The nurse flashed a glance at Laura.

"And there was a child—a boy?"

The woman gazed beyond her into distance.

"So I believe." Her tone was indifferent. Then, with sudden emotion, she turned to Laura.

"Dear girl, why go probing into this dismal past? What good will it do you? Is it not better—to let the dead past bury its dead. Old divorce cases—cases involving people all dead and gone—oh, I suppose you have your reasons, Miss Winright, and good reasons too: but it does seem a pity!"

Laura caught her breath. Her heart cried out, echoing the woman's words. This very thought had formed in her own mind: "What good? What good will it do?"

She stifled the impulsive outcry of her soul.

"I must find that boy," she said, with a smile.

Mrs. Villard stared at her. Her deep eyes asked a host of questions she did not voice. Then she, too, smiled, suddenly, sweetly:

"Miss Winright, others have failed to find that boy. Mr. Villard himself tried very hard, and could not. I suppose," she hurried her words, "he—my husband—

was sorry for the woman. You know, after the divorce, the court left the boy to her. So it has been told me. She was very ill in the hospital, this woman, and while she lay ill the child was given away, and she never saw it again. And then—then——"

"Then?" Laura's tone was expectant.

Mrs. Villard sat silent a long time.

"What would you have her do?" Her pitying tone made Laura think of soft spring showers. "Would you have her live—without her husband, without her child, without her good name? Could you live, dear, if you were bereft of everything?"

"She died?"

Mrs. Villard did not answer. She was studying Laura's face. She shook her head at last.

"If you are a Winright," she said, thoughtfully, "it must be your mother you resemble."

Laura started, so utterly unexpected were the words.

"I do resemble my mother. My father was dark, and I am fair." She smiled radiantly.

"And why are you so anxious to learn these things?" Mrs. Villard's tone was pleasantly regretful. "Why so interested—if"—apologetically—"it is not too much for me to ask?"

Glory shrugged her shoulders.

"As I have said, we wish to find this boy."

"But why?" Soft, insinuating the tones—yet persistent.

"He might be a legatee under Adam Winright's will," returned the nurse carelessly. "The will hasn't been opened, but—well, there was once such a child. We thought you might know where he is, what is his name. So we came to find out."

"His name? I couldn't tell you."

The lawyer's widow hesitated.

"Remember, Miss Adair," she went on, "Mr. Villard sought this boy, and Mr. Villard had information which neither you nor I now possess. The old dockets, the papers in the case, were destroyed long ago. There may be court records on file in Buffalo. Mr. Villard, when he searched, had all that information to help him—knew regarding the case all there was to know. He knew the hospital where the woman was sick, the names of the attendants who waited on her, and, I daresay, the priest who buried her." Her smile had just a hint of grimness. "He made enquiries of every one who might know. He failed to find the boy, when all the circumstances were quite fresh in human memories. What can you do, now, my friends—you, who have, to begin with, only the woman's name?"

Glory answered with a swift question.

"Why do you wish us to fail?"

"I do not. I wish you to succeed." Mrs. Villard's tone had been indifferent a moment before; now it grew earnest. "God knows I would have you find that boy, if only because James Villard tried to find him, and could not."

Her tones were earnest, but her look was hopeless, discouraging. Laura caught her sleeve, drew closer to her, gazed into the kindly face. "Help us, please," she pleaded. "I believe you can help us, more, perhaps, than you think."

A long time the lawyer's widow sat silent. At length, reluctantly, she shook her head.

"No, Miss Winright. It is hopeless. Can you succeed, you who are so distant from these things, when James Villard, who was close to all the facts, failed?"

Glory intervened.

"Surely there is some one else who can help us?"

Eagerly Laura watched the kindly face. Her hopes hung on the answer. "If we find this son," she told her-

self, "we find the Man in Grey. And we must find him. *I* must find him."

"Surely there is some one, Mrs. Villard?" She repeated Glory's urgings.

"There is one man on earth," said the woman. "Just one, Miss Winright. James Villard questioned him at the time, and wasn't quite convinced that he told all the truth. He used to be a theatrical man in those days and knew this woman—this actress, this Lucile Meloche." Again Laura discerned the faintest hint of contempt in the tone. "In the days before she fell ill, he wanted to take the child. Mr. Villard suspected he might have taken it. But I do not know where that man is now. He was a sort of ne'er do well, as you would call him, living by his wits, and drifting all over the world."

She seemed to deliberate on the phrases, as though fearing an error in her rendering.

"Even if you did find this man, it might not be wise to ask him. He was very strange. A little—oh, queer! Perhaps, if you did learn his address, it would be best to write. He might tell you something if he wished."

"And who is he?" Laura's tone was eager. "And where?"

"Where, I don't know. Maybe in the west. He is the sort of man might go to new places. I have not heard of him in years—many years. His name——"

Laura leaned close.

"—— is Pat Burnville."

The two younger women exchanged glances.

"Pat Burnville!" echoed both.

Glory recovered herself.

"But, Mrs. Villard——" she began again.

Laura sat back, watching the kindly face, listening, wondering—and noticing, oddly, with what tragic con-

sistency Glory Adair's most penetrating questions seemed to fail.

"I remember very little of the matter, very little," insisted the woman.

At last she rose suddenly, and caught Laura's hand.

"Do not prod into this poor old past, Miss Winright," she urged. "Let the dead past cover up its mistakes, its sins—yes, its tragedies. Live your own life, dear girl—you have it all before you. Let the lives that suffered and ended be forgotten. Can't you do that? Isn't it better, now?"

Laura's resolution met the challenge.

"I shall find this Pat Burnville and talk to him."

"There is no use," returned the woman. "He is dangerous. And, what is there to learn? The child is dead. I know—dead."

Her voice was dry; stiffly she sat, as though her words and her thoughts were far apart. Then she smiled, her face lit with tenderness.

"I'm so sorry, dear Miss Winright, that I can't help you. But, remember, no good ever comes of stirring up these old tragedies. Let the dead alone, dear girl, and live your own life. Yes, I am sorry——"

Laura's last impression was of a weary-eyed woman with tears in her voice clinging appealingly to her arm.

Glory went down the walk with furrowed brows.

"What does she know that makes her so sorry for you?"

"She was a lawyer's widow," returned Laura, wisely. "And a lawyer sees many tragedies."

They walked thoughtfully down the Stone Road, past the fine country homes, into the modest village. Serried armies of peach trees guarded them on every side. This time, Glory was oblivious.

"We have to do it at last," she murmured, resignedly.

"We have to go to Harry Burnville, and ask what relation he is to Pat Burnville, and where Pat Burnville is to be found? And that means—yes, that means we have to tell him everything."

She grumbled, and with Laura boarded the next train.

It was late in the evening when they crossed the Detroit car-ferry. From the Union Station they telephoned Burnville's office in Woodward Avenue, but could get no response.

"He's still out of town, I suppose," commented Glory. "We'll call in the morning."

They did so. On the seventh floor of the tall office building, the door of Room 73 stood ajar. "Harry Burnville, Private Detective Agency," announced the gilt-lettered sign on the glass, with the postscript:

"Walk In."

In walked Glory, past the grumbling stage and once more serene, turning over in her pretty head some facile scheme for locating Pat Burnville without disclosing to his namesake the vital facts she had learned.

The ante-chamber was neat, clean, orderly as Harry Burnville himself. The door of an inner office, standing ajar, revealed a desk perfectly clean, a filing cabinet, a book-case and a few minor items of office furniture, all spick and span.

In the swivel chair before the desk lounged a man with his back to them. His feet were on the desk. There hung over him a filmy cloud of blue smoke; a rank odour of cheap tobacco.

Laura glanced at a gleaming mirror on the opposite wall. The man's face was reflected there. She started sharply back.

The swivel chair rasped round, and the occupant's heavy feet hit the floor with a thud.

"Well? What d'you want?" he snarled.

Laura's glance took in the smudgy dressing gown, the threatening unshaven face, the bleary eyes, the straggly grey moustache. In his hand the man held an ill-smelling pipe. She shrank, as from a growling cur.

"We would like to see Mr. Burnville," put in Glory.

"A' right. Sit down." He half kicked, half pushed, a couple of chairs toward them. One chair tottered and fell. The brute in the dressing gown made no attempt to right it.

"When will Mr. Burnville be in?" Laura's tone was anxious.

"He's right here."

"Where?" Incredulously the girl's eyes searched the room.

"Here." The ogre, with a gurgling chuckle tapped his breast. "I'm Burnville."

CHAPTER XIX

THE WOMAN WHO COULD TELL

Laura, trembling, remembered Mrs. Villard's warning.

"Mr. *Harry* Burnville," she explained, coldly.

"Oh! Me boy!" Into the roaring voice crept a hint of tenderness. "Very like, Miss, he's at a little place up the lakes—I'll see——"

He slammed through a diary lying on the desk.

"Here 'tis! Winright—Maitland Port! That's it! That's the place, miss."

"You're looking at May," scoffed Glory. "This is July."

In a flash the man's brow grew black, his lips twitched savagely, his eyes shot lightning.

"Miss!"

Laura shivered toward the door.

"This," explained Glory, "is Mr. Winright's sister——"

"Very like it is on that business you come." Pat Burnville's tone softened. "Harry may be back very soon, and could ye come again—maybe to-morrow——"

Miss Adair's keen eyes shifted from the unshaven face to the rough hands. She smiled.

"Sit down, Laura. Mr. Burnville, we'll wait for your boy. I don't think he's far."

"Miss! Miss!" Pat Burnville, seething in ebullient rage, suggested a volcano eruptive. "Miss! Call me a liar, will ye? Call Pat Burnville a liar? Harry! Me boy! Where is he? Where is he?" He grew fairly

incoherent in his rage. "Here! Here!" He slammed over the pages of the diary. "Here 'tis! Buffalo! Winright case, Buffalo! That's where he is."

"Buffalo?" mused Laura. She knew why Burnville was in Buffalo.

But Buffalo was within a few hours of Grimsby. Buffalo was the old home of Lawyer Villard, the place where, so far as she knew, Lucile Meloche had been divorced, and had died.

Glory laughed.

"Call me a liar, will ye?" growled Pat Burnville.

"I can't do that, Mr. Burnville." Glory leaned close to him. Laura had a sense of sickening shock. "So Harry is your boy?"

The old man caught a note of challenge, and again his temper flared.

"He is! He is!"

"He doesn't look it. He dresses like a prince and acts like a gentleman."

To Laura's surprise, Pat Burnville subsided into the swivel chair, and let go an approving chuckle.

"That's me Harry! He goes in for style and fine clothes, does Hal. Pat's all for dirty duds and honest comfort."

Laura felt annoyance. All this by-play of contradiction was getting them nowhere. She feared this unwieldy brute, she longed to run away from him, she lingered only because there were questions to be asked. She was eager to hurry Glory: Glory, who seemed quite unafraid and in no haste to go.

"Do you know," said Glory, "we called on Harry because we wanted to find you?"

"Me?"

"That's correct, isn't it, Laura?"

Laura nodded weakly. Upon her memory was written

in letters of fire Mrs. Villard's warning against this man. His hoarse chuckle as he took up his pipe sent a shiver through her. She would question him because she had to: but she was eager to be through.

"We wished to ask a few questions, Mr. Burnville—just a few." She made her tone propitiatory. "That is, if—if it is not imposing on your kindness."

His sudden smile was like sunshine kissing a crag.

"Ask to your heart's content, miss." Half rising, he bowed with supreme grace.

Laura, suspicious, frightened, yet determined, went on:

"It is rather a long story, Mr. Burnville. To cut it short—to keep from imposing too much—did you know my father, Adam Winright?"

Burnville smoked diligently.

"Very like I have seen him."

"Or any one else of that name?"

Laura felt his cautious eyes studying her keenly.

"No, miss."

"Perhaps," she urged, insinuatingly, "a Mrs. Winright—a Mrs. Lucile Winright——?"

Pat Burnville removed his pipe. He gazed at the red rug. His mind seemed groping in dim corridors of the past. Laura waited.

The man at last glanced up. Laura was surprised by the friendliness of his smile.

"I may have heard the name, miss. But in my time I've met so many people and heard so many names——"

"Try to remember, won't you?"

Before the radiant smile, Laura's terror had vanished. The fault was Glory's, for provoking this man to anger; handled as she meant to handle him, he would tell all he knew and keep his terrible temper in leash. "Try, please. It means so much to me! She was an actress, I think—it would be twenty-eight years ago——"

Pat Burnville strove to read the history of twenty-eight years ago in the red rug. He blew forth a smoke cloud. Then he blew a bigger one. Then, regretfully, he shook his head.

"I'm getting old, miss. Me memory isn't what it used to be."

"Before her marriage," went on pertinacious Laura, "she was Lucile Meloche."

Pat Burnville laid his pipe on the desk, and half-turned the swivel chair. He looked Laura up and down. She shrank; but his smile was disarming.

"Ah, miss—me memory—me memory——"

In the words rang the deep, stagey note of the tragedian.

"Rotten memory, isn't it?" drawled Glory, insolently. "Covers a multitude of lies? Eh?"

The deep set eyes gleamed.

"Miss! Miss!" The voice rose to a roar.

"Oh, yes," drawled Glory, still serene, "it's a mighty convenient memory. And you—you try to deceive a woman—a trusting girl who asks you a straightforward question—you try to deceive her with mean, petty evasions? Is it because you don't know how to tell the truth?"

"Me? Pat?" He rose, towering over her. "Are ye talking to me?"

Glory looked up at him, unafraid.

"Sit down," she commanded.

Laura tugged her sleeve.

"Don't anger him, Glory," she begged.

She would have retreated, but loyalty to her friend bade her stay. Glory paid no attention to her pleadings. She studied the angry old man as calmly as she would the developing symptoms of a case.

"You sit here and tell lies to my friend," she cried.

"You tell her you know nothing. Tell her you've forgotten. Why don't you tell her the truth, that you're ashamed—ashamed to admit you ever knew Lucile Meloche?"

"Ashamed!" he roared. "Ashamed! I'm not. I'm proud I knew her and glad I helped her. Poor girl!" He sat back in his chair, his shoulders humped, his face white, his huge frame trembling with fury. "Poor girl! Poor girl!"

"*You* help her?" scoffed Glory.

"I did. It was when that hound, Winright, threw her off like a worn-out coat . . . why? Just for a bit of a temper, and what's that?" He softened. "Old Pat himself has a bit of a temper."

"She was to blame in the divorce——"

"That's a blasted lie!" shouted Pat. Then, with a huge effort, he gripped his unruly temper, and sat fuming, glancing from one to the other of his tormentors, as though fearful of their questionings.

"Of course she was to blame."

"No!" The thunder tones rolled up again. "No! The man was wrong—wrong—wrong! I never knew him, but I knew her. I knew her when she lay in that hospital, nigh unto death. And that poor little baby—that poor little baby——"

He choked, did the ogre, and began to wipe his eyes with a huge red handkerchief.

"The baby?" put in eager Laura. "What happened the baby?"

"I don't know."

"And Lucile Meloche?" Laura pressed her eager questions. "And her husband? Is he alive?" She was fairly surprised at her own acumen in putting the question thus.

A subtle look came into the deep-set eyes.

"Ah, miss—me memory——"

He looked down, abashed, at Glory's scornful glance. Then he commenced to clean his pipe, knocking out the ashes on the shiny desk.

"I didn't know so very much about Lucile Meloche," he murmured, smoothly. "No—I saw her very little. And Winright—well, him I never saw. But there is a woman can tell you the whole story of Lucile Meloche from the cradle to——"

"The grave?" Laura flashed.

Burnville tightened his lips.

"Umph!"

"And who is the woman?"

"You know her, I guess? Eh, pretty?"

He chucked Laura familiarly under the chin. She snatched up her hand to strike him; then halted, terrified.

"Who is she—please?" The daughter of Adam Winright was very humble.

"Oh, I'm not telling that."

Miss Winright glanced at Glory; but the nurse seemed in no haste to essay Burnville again.

"Listen, Mr. Burnville," urged Laura. "Here is what we were told at Grimsby, a little place in Canada, by Mrs. Villard, the widow of the lawyer who looked after the divorce case."

Pat Burnville commenced leisurely to saw a plug of tobacco with a bone-handled jack-knife. He kept his eyes on his task.

"Huh?" he grunted.

Laura told him what she had gleaned from Mrs. Villard. Burnville leisurely filled his pipe, tamped down the tobacco, struck a match.

"Mrs. Villard told you that?" His tones now were smooth as oil.

"Yes, just that. Nothing more."

"Huh?" He was lighting his pipe; that left room for only the non-committal grunt. "Huh?" He puffed comfortably. Again the subtle cunning shone in his eyes.

"She said you might know where the child was, and might be willing to tell."

Pat Burnville smiled, self-satisfied.

"Where is that child, Mr. Burnville? A grown man now, of course, but——"

Burnville shook his head.

"I don't know, Miss Winright. If I did know, would it be right to tell?"

"Is he alive?"

"Ah, miss, how should I know? Maybe he is, maybe not. Poor little fellow!"

"Who took him? Where was the hospital where his mother lay ill?"

Pat Burnville studied the rug. Laura watched, puzzled as to whether he told the truth, but above all things fearful lest she provoke another outburst.

"Did Mrs. Villard know?"

"She did not, Mr. Burnville. Her husband tried to find the boy, but could not."

"Then if he could not, no man could." Pat Burnville, unprovoked, was smoothly philosophical. "Ah, it's a cruel world, miss; and most cruel to little children that are left alone."

Glory had sat back, viewing this questioning with a dispassionate, almost contemptuous air. Now, rising, she came forward, and looked very hard at Pat Burnville. He smiled, and tried to dodge her gaze.

"You can't deceive me," she told him. "I've sized it all up. I know why you don't tell the truth. You did so many dirty things at that time, in that divorce case. You say you helped the woman because you were sorry for her. Pat Burnville, you were ashamed—ashamed

that you'd told lies about her to her husband, ashamed that you'd lied against her in court, ashamed——"

"Stop!" The volcano seethed; the huge, mountainous body rocked. "Me tell lies against a woman! Me! I'd singe in the fires of hell a thousand years before I'd do what you say. No—I did what I could to help her, miss, I did, and—I'm telling the truth, brown eyes," he bellowed, annoyed by her look of doubt.

"You, Pat Burnville, you couldn't tell the truth."

"Couldn't!" So angry was he, Pat Burnville forgot to curse. He staggered to his feet; he stood blinking at Glory. "You—you——"

Laura clutched the nurse's arm.

"Come, Glory, come away."

"I'm disgusted with you. To swear away a poor woman's good name——"

"Stop it! Stop it!" roared the man, frantic in his anger. "You lie! You lie! I never saw her till they came from the hospital, knowing I'd played a bit. 'We've an actress woman sick,' they said. 'D'you know her friends?' "

He still seethed, though less violently. Glory hid her elation; her face wore the same contemptuous sneer, the same look of profound disbelief. Pat Burnville writhed under it.

"Well, she hadn't any friends—she was down and out. And I—I helped her. When they thought she was dying, they took the kid away. I don't know where the kid is. That's all there is to that. Nigh twenty-eight years ago." His jerky words vibrated with anger. "I told 'em I'd pay her hospital bill, but afterward, they said it was paid—they didn't say who paid it. That's all I know."

"Where was this?"

"In New York. The old hospital's gone now. Everybody that knew about it is gone—not that they paid much

attention to her then, or remembered her a day after she passed on, or cared whether the kid they took lived or died. That's all, I tell you."

Glory Adair sighed.

"Thank you, Mr. Burnville. And—who is the Man in Grey?"

Burnville stared; then laughed shortly.

"Oh, you do well to laugh," snapped the nurse. "That's pretty good for you."

Pat Burnville's voice soared.

"I don't know what you mean."

"Well, this Winright—where is he?"

"I don't know. Never saw him."

"You knew him?"

"No. I just knew of him. At the hospital they called the woman Mrs. Meloche. She told me the other name."

He sat, his brow a thundercloud of wrath. Then, suddenly, he spoke again, in a queer, wailing voice:

"At night I used to sit by her bed, sometimes, being they were short of nurses and she hated to be left alone." He laid aside his pipe; his eyes half closed. "One—two—three—four—five—six—seven—eight——"

Laura was terrified.

"What do you mean?" she cried.

"—nine—ten—eleven—twelve—thirteen—fourteen—fifteen—sixteen——"

The listeners stared at one another.

"—seventeen—eighteen—nineteen—twenty—no, no, my God!"

Laura clung to the nurse in sheer terror of the man's acting. He stiffened; then slowly came back to himself, as though waking from a trance.

"That's the way she went, in her delirium. It gets me yet, when I let myself think of her."

"But what did she mean by it?"

"I don't know. When her head was clear she told me nothing much; except that her name had been Winright, and her man had divorced her, and—and her heart was broken."

Laura sat silent. This at least, she felt, was truth. Her impetuous heart went our across the years to the lonely woman of long ago whom her own mother had displaced.

"Of course," cut in Glory, sceptically, "when you spoke just now of a woman who could tell us about Lucile Meloche, that was just one of Pat Burnville's lies!"

"Pat! Pat!" Again the thunderous tragedian raged. "No. Here! I'll write down her address. You go to her, and insist, and—she'll tell you."

Glory laughed her disbelief.

"I will write it, brown eyes! Here! Blast it! Where's that pencil?" He found a stub, and, gripping it, cursed savagely the paper that slipped from his unpracticed fingers.

"Here——"

He halted, and folded the paper.

"No. You don't look till you're outside," he blackly admonished. "More, you don't come back—not till you've seen this woman and got her story. Promise."

"Sure," purred Glory. "I'll not look at the paper till we reach the street."

"And don't come back."

Rising, he strode across the antechamber and flung wide the door, waiting with fuming impatience while they passed out.

On the elevator landing seven stories down, Laura still clung apprehensively to Glory's arm. Timidly glancing up the shaft, she fancied the thunderous brute leaning down and menacing her.

"He was horrible!" she whispered. "I thought—I

thought I'd never escape alive. Glory, do you know, I fancied you were actually trying to provoke him. Surely he was savage enough as it was!"

With a handkerchief Glory flecked a bit of dust from her skirt.

"He was angry, wasn't he? And, Laura dear, what he told us when he was angry was the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But I certainly had to provoke him to keep him angry. I had to defame him past all redemption." Her laugh rippled. "Oh, Laura, palmistry *is* a tremendous help in sizing up the other player in your game."

"You—you sat there like a statue—and read his hand —and deliberately irritated him——?"

"I had to. His hand told me that if I wanted the truth, I must get that man raging angry." As she spoke, she descended to Woodward Avenue. "You see," explained the nurse, "in his aboriginal state, Pat Burnville is a sheer savage, and in his anger blurts out the truth. But he has to make his living by his wits. He's schooled himself, in a sort of fashion, to be smooth and easy and to deceive. Give him his own way, and the habit that has become like second nature will rule and he'll tell you lies without end, and keep his secrets tight in his breast. Scratch and worry till he relapses into the savage and——"

A terrifying thought flashed to Laura's mind.

"You saw his hands, Glory. Is he—is he the man in grey?"

Glory laughed.

"If so, he has deserted his colours and discarded his beard. And that dressing gown was once red."

"But his hands?"

Glory consulted her wrist-watch. Then she held up the folded note Pat Burnville had given her.

"East or west?" she challenged. "California or—Canada?"

"Canada!" exclaimed Laura, surprised.

Glory unfolded the paper. "I'm prepared to go wherever this note sends me. I kept Pat Burnville provoked and he wrote the truth. This woman can tell us——"

Laura stared at the handwriting. Ragged, crabbed, unnatural, it expressed the man himself. She read:

Mrs. James Villard
Stone Road, just outside
Grimsby, Canada.

CHAPTER XX

THE ROAD OF TEARS

There was nothing for it but the long railroad journey back to Grimsby.

To Laura Winright, the Niagara Escarpment when again she saw it suggested the relentless destiny that had first brought her father face to face with Lucile Meloche, and thereafter had pursued him to his death. It overhung her like the imminent disclosures she sought. What was it Mrs. Villard had concealed from them? Why had she concealed it? Was it through pity for Lucile Meloche, or through pity for Laura Winright? How, anyway, could they persuade the woman to tell? Might it not be better, even now, to let her keep her secret?

Thus Laura debated, trudging moodily along the Stone Road.

"Smile," urged the nurse. "Smile, for Heaven's sake."

At the grey-stone cottage the maid eyed them curiously, took their cards, and brought back a decidedly negative shake of the head.

"Mrs. Villard is lying down. She cannot see anyone."

Glory warmed the maid with her demurest smile.

"She's not ill, surely! I'm so sorry. Laura"—she turned to her companion—"it wouldn't do for us to go away without telling Mrs. Villard, would it? Tell her," she added to the maid, "that—or, wait, please——"

With a little pencil she scribbled a few words on the back of her card:

"We have seen Pat Burnville."

"I can't go away till Mrs. Villard has read that," she told the maid. "But tell her, please, that we don't insist on seeing her."

The girl, returning presently, ushered them into the sitting-room.

Then Mrs. Villard came. Laura fancied the lawyer's widow had aged since their last visit. The kindly face was now cold and unsmiling; yet there was warm expectancy in the eyes.

"You found him soon." She did not stop for polite parley. "And—he told you——?" She remembered herself. "Sit down, please. You must excuse me, but I'm really interested, even though I didn't want you to go probing into these things." Her eyes questioned the nurse.

"He told us a little," began Glory, "but——"

"The child?"

"No. He declared he knew nothing as to the child."

Disappointment shadowed the dark eyes. "You'll think it queer of me to be so interested in what's no concern of mine," she apologized. "But you, Miss Winright, were so interested yourself!"

Glory silently handed her Pat Burnville's slip of paper. At sight of the handwriting, Mrs. Villard seemed to stiffen.

"It is his writing," she commented, oddly. "Pat Burnville's writing."

"He said," pursued Glory, "that you could tell us the entire story of Lucile Meloche."

"I!"

She turned on Laura a tragic smile.

"Dear girl," she urged, "cannot you let the past alone? It holds nothing but sorrow. It will do you no good to know."

"So Pat Burnville was right?" flashed the nurse.

Mrs. Villard looked down.

"Yes," she at last faltered. "He was right. I do know."

"And"—Glory's tone grew very gentle—"you'll help us, Mrs. Villard—you'll tell us everything?"

She must right then have felt her handicaps. She was not a man like Burnville, she was not a detective as Burnville was. He could use influences that were not hers. She must plead where he might even dare threaten. If this woman refused to tell, she had no means to make her tell.

Mrs. Villard sat a long time, deliberating.

"I have said it is better to let the past lie in its grave," she protested. "I can see the harm. I have tried to put away all thought of telling; I see no good in telling. But —who knows?"

She gave a queer little shrug of her shoulder.

"At least you'll answer questions?" pleaded Laura Winright.

The dark eyes shone.

"Yes, Miss Winright, I'll do that for you. I'll answer questions, Miss Adair." Her manner was nervously excited. "Mr. Villard was a lawyer, Miss Adair. You shall be a lawyer and I a witness—a hostile witness, I warn you, but a witness in the box, sworn to tell the truth. So far as you can secure it"—her glance was a challenge—"you are to have the truth . . ."

Laura started. This was another than the kindly, tearful woman who had pleaded with her to give up her dogged search. This woman was under stress of emotions that Laura Winright could not fathom. She had been brooding; she had been threshing out this problem in her own soul; her broodings had brought her to no decision, yet had lifted her out of herself.

". . . . And you must go in an hour," she concluded, crying out shrilly.

Glory leaned forward.

"That will suit me, Mrs. Villard. Now, if you will tell your story——"

Challenge gleamed in the dark eyes.

"No. You must fight for it."

Glory shrugged her shoulders.

"Lucile Meloche was a foreigner?"

"Yes."

"Spanish?"

"No. French." Mrs. Villard had guarded herself in monosyllables; now she tried to guard herself by answering more than was asked, as a shrewd witness will. "Not a desirable woman. An actress, you know. Oh, I make no apologies for her——"

Laura started. This woman, then, defended her father, even as Pat Burnville had assailed him.

"You knew her personally?"

Mrs. Villard studied.

"Can I say it to my credit? You know, a lawyer's wife meets many of his clients with whom she is not pleased to associate. And I have been a lawyer's wife; and Mr. Villard defended this suit against Lucile Meloche. You see?"

"She was a native of France?"

Mrs. Villard showed relief.

"No."

"Yet French? A French-Canadian?"

"Daughter of a French officer." Glory's look demanded more. "A native of one of the worst countries in the world, Miss Adair. Do you know of Cayenne? Americans often call it French Guiana. At that time there was a penal settlement. The father of Lucile Meloche was an officer there; her mother the daughter

of a man who traded with the Caribs up the river Maroni——"

Glory's quick forefinger dipped into her palm, a way she had of emphasizing a mental note.

"Caribs," she repeated. "A cruel, barbarous tribe, cannibals sometimes? So Lucile Meloche grew up in Cayenne, which, you tell me"—she smiled—"is not the garden of Eden. Yet Lucile Meloche, thirty years ago, was in New York?"

"Her father was unfortunate. He left the army."

"Cashiered?"

Mrs. Villard shrugged her shoulders, but stiffly.

"He was—I am told he was a brave man. Why should I sully his memory?"

"He came to New York?"

"To Salem. It was still a great port in those days. He intended to make his fortune but——"

"He failed?"

"He died—so I am told," she qualified. "That was thirty years ago. Lucile was then about twenty."

"And beautiful?" whispered Laura, visioning the face of the picture.

"As to that——" Again the queer shrug completed the sentence. "She became an actress."

"It was then she met Mr. Winright?"

The witness nodded assent. Glory Adair, Laura realized, was painfully feeling her way for an opening. Mrs. Villard hastened to qualify.

"I called myself a witness," she said. "Yet you cannot expect me to speak of first hand knowledge. My husband, you see, was lawyer in the divorce proceedings. It naturally follows"—her tone was studiously impersonal—"that what a lawyer's wife learns of his cases is information gained at second hand, and, therefore, does not constitute evidence in a court of law. She speaks

at a greater distance than an actual participant. Her memory of what she learns is apt to grow dim—yes, very dim."

Glory disregarded her.

"They fell in love?"

"I have reason to believe she loved him very much."

"Yet within two years he sued for divorce."

The woman studied.

"It is a very strange world, Miss Adair. Are any two people cast in identical mould? No. There was the difference in race. Then she had the southern temper; those born under the tropics are quick to anger, I have heard say. He had ambitions: she was a drag, as he saw it. Then, too, in those days the woman who had been an actress lived always under a cloud. Yet if he had not loved her at least a little, what he heard would not have hurt him. And if she had not cared, her heart would not have broken. What could she do? Poor—friendless—alone—and he——"

"He was wealthy?"

The witness shook her head.

"Just well to do—his parents, I mean."

"You knew them?"

"No. This all happened, you see, before I married Mr. Villard, and about the time of the divorce they died."

"He had a brother?" Glory's questions were coming quick and fast.

"Yes—somewhere in the west, I think."

"Did you know him?"

"Not then."

"Afterward?"

"I—I heard of him, afterward."

"Was there hard feeling between the brothers?"

Laura fancied she caught the drift of this questioning.

The brother, Harold, might have been the mysterious visitor to Adam Winright; might have come back again and again to demand the price of silence. With bated breath she awaited the woman's answer.

"No."

The tone was positive.

"On what grounds was the suit?"

"Incompatibility."

Thus far the testimony merely corroborated what they knew, and pieced together a little more neatly the story of the old letters and Pat Burnville's chance hints.

"Now, was there another man in the case?"

"No."

The answer was emphatic. Its emphasis startled Laura. Again came the tap of the forefinger into Glory's palm. She was putting away another mental note.

"Where did Pat Burnville come in?"

"Afterward. He had been an actor, and was married. He did not know Lucile Meloche till after her husband left her; then he befriended her and her child. He wanted to take the boy into his own home, such as it was."

"I see," mused Glory, disappointedly. "Did he get the child?"

"Not then."

"Or at any time?"

Mrs. Villard hesitated.

"I do not know."

"You suspect him?"

Again the shrug of the soulders. "Lucile Meloche suspected him."

Glory deliberated. Her next question she put very slowly.

"After the divorce, this woman wrote to her husband?"

Mrs. Villard's hands trembled; her lips tightened to

a line. Then, "Poor thing," she murmured. "You must remember——"

"She wrote to her husband?"

"One letter."

"And its purport was—what?"

Glory knew; and Laura was well aware that Glory merely tested the witness.

"A very foolish letter, I understand." Mrs. Villard seemed pleading the cause of the discarded wife. "Even the oldest and wisest of us say things we do not mean. She was young and impetuous, remember—hot tempered—and—yes, she had suffered. Suffered!" She dwelt on the word. "It was a foolish letter—a wicked letter—yet——"

"Justified?"

"No, not justified." Glory's look insisted. "She wrote—oh, well, she wrote she would train her son—his son—to execute vengeance——"

Her rigid face softened suddenly into a warm smile.

"Ah, dear!"—her words were for the younger girl—"love makes us do foolish things, sometimes—yes, and wicked things. That was foolish and wicked. Yes, and vain—is not vengeance in the hands of God?"

The smile vanished as quickly as it had come. The dark eyes saw, not the two watchers, but a terrifying vision.

"Afterward, she lay ill in the hospital, and, when they thought her dying, her boy—he who was to have wrought vengeance—he was taken away—and——"

Emotional Laura wiped her eyes. Mrs. Villard turned to her.

"You have a kind heart, Miss Winright. I love you for it!" Rising, she drew near, imperious no longer. "Will you let me kiss you?"

Laura flung her arms about her; then flushed, abashed at her own impulse.

Glory Adair, her mind intent on the time-limit, intervened.

"Lucile Meloche believed that Pat Burnville had spirited away the child?"

"She suspected. She never knew. Now Pat Burnville denied; again, he refused to say. No one seemed to know. Perhaps—perhaps the baby died while she lay sick——"

Her look grew grim and hard.

"A punishment, I suppose, for her wickedness. Only, it was not all her punishment. There is one thing more—just one——"

She rose, and went to a little writing-desk in the corner of the room. She moved very softly, gliding rather than walking. Laura's wondering gaze followed her.

She turned at last.

"The other day I told you all the papers in the Winright case were destroyed, and they were, but—I still have this——"

She handed Glory a newspaper clipping.

"Read it, if you wish," she whispered. "I—I would rather not——"

The clipping was faded yellow. No date showed; Glory's quick scrutiny found here and there a turned letter, hint to her keen mind that the paper was printed before typesetting machines were common. "That must be Detroit," commented Laura when they had read a few lines.

The headline was inconspicuous:

DROWNED MAN IDENTIFIED

The body washed ashore at Bois Blanc on Tuesday was this morning identified by Adam Winright, shipping clerk of the

Annisford store, as that of his brother, Harold Winright of Niagara Falls, N. Y.

The unfortunate young man was expected here this week to accompany Mr. Winright on a hunting trip to Northern Michigan. He is thought to be the same man reported to have jumped overboard from the passenger steamer *Darius Cole.*

The body was so badly disfigured that it could be identified only by a ring the man wore. Mr. Winright was completely overcome by the shock.

Coroner Powers decided an inquest unnecessary. The funeral arrangements have not yet been completed. Interment will take place here. Mr. Winright of this city is the only surviving relative.

Dry as dust the item; dry as the dust on laid-away clippings of twenty-eight years ago; just such uninspired writing as one finds in a newspaper any and every day.

Glory laid down the clipping.

Laura gazed at her with shining eyes. Involuntarily they both turned to the woman, who sat with face averted.

"Mrs. Villard."

There were tears in the woman's eyes.

"Mrs. Villard"—Laura's hopes were bounding—"the man who married and divorced Lucile Meloche was——?"

"Harold Winright?" questioned Glory.

"Yes."

In Mrs. Villard's tone was no surprise.

"Harold Winright!" wonderingly repeated Laura, as yet not comprehending all this meant to her. Some words of Pat Burnville rang in her memory. "The scoundrel—the black sheep—Harold Winright——"

Mrs. Villard whirled on her.

"No," she cried, fiercely. "You must not call him that!"

Glory restrained her.

"Laura is only repeating what Pat Burnville said. Go on, Mrs. Villard."

"There is nothing more to tell."

"There is one thing you have not told us," urged Glory. "Listen! When Lucile Meloche lay in the hospital, delirious, she kept counting—one—two—three—four——"

Like a tolling bell her sweet voice rang out the numbers.

"— five — six — seven — eight—nine—ten—eleven—twelve—thirteen—fourteen—fifteen—sixteen——"

Mrs. Villard's face was ashen. She sank into a chair.

"—seventeen—eighteen—nineteen—twenty——"

"No, no, my God!"

Staggering to her feet, her shrill cry caught the words from Glory's lips.

She stood an instant, blinking, as one suddenly come into light.

"May God forgive me!" she muttered. "No"—determinedly—"I cannot tell. I will not tell."

Glory looked her full in the eyes.

"At twenty-one, her boy would be a man, and—then he would strike? After waiting till Harold Winright had won to the pinnacle of success—had achieved the ambitions on which Lucile Meloche was a drag—then—then—he would strike——?"

The woman moved her dry lips, but found no answer.

"Then—at twenty-one—he would strike?" insisted Glory.

"She repented," faltered Mrs. Villard. "She lost him—the man she loved—she lost her son—she trod the road of tears alone—and—the blow never fell——"

One thought was uppermost in Laura's mind.

"I imagined it was my own father," she muttered. "But—it was Harold Winright—it was Harold Winright——"

Glory gave her no heed.

"Just one thing more," she urged, very tenderly. "Even before you speak, Mrs. Villard, I know the answer. But, I would rather have it come freely from you. You know so much that is intimate—that is not second-hand knowledge—you come so near to the very heart of things—you feel it all so much—*how?*"

The woman gazed at her steadily.

"I—I was Lucile Meloche."

CHAPTER XXI

THE UNANSWERED QUESTION

In the long silence that followed, Laura Winright's mind thrilled with the jubilant thought:

"It was not my father."

Not her father, but Harold Winright, who put away his wife. To her unsophisticated, unworldly soul, with its high ideals, that had always been the crowning tragedy. Nothing had troubled her more than the divorce itself, the beginning of all the trouble. In Judith MacTurk's eyes, divorce and devil both began with a D; and Laura Winright had been brought up at Judith MacTurk's knee.

It mattered nothing to her that all the fine fabric of theory they had woven from the letters in the Ghost Room was all blown to ruin in a breath; that all their tedious enquiries had brought them up against a blank wall. Nothing mattered—so long as Harold Winright, not her father, was the man who had divorced Lucile Meloche.

She checked her triumphant thoughts.

Her eyes brimmed with tears of self-reproach. There sat Lucile Villard, sobbing softly, her imperious dignity crushed by the remembrance of that old sorrow—Lucile Villard, who had reluctantly accepted the protection of a good man's name and fortune, and who yet, after twenty-eight years, hungered for the love of her impetuous girlhood.

Laura crossed swiftly to the older woman, and, stooping, kissed her.

"Dear!" whispered the woman.

She went on, brokenly:

"It is a long, long time ago . . . but he was very good to me."

There was no hint of reproach. It was the voice of undying sorrow.

Laura Winright questioned the nurse with a look. Surely it was time to go?

Glory Adair did not answer in words. Laura wondered what were her thoughts. She felt rather triumphant, though she kept her triumph to herself. The issue had proved all Glory's palm-reading wrong. Her soul had always rebelled against Glory's positive assumption that what she read in Adam Winright's hand—yes, and in Laura's—could not help but be right.

"Yes," said Mrs. Villard, presently, "I was indeed Lucile Meloche." She smiled, seemingly actually happy that her persecutors had wrested the truth from her.

"And the boy was your son?" whispered Glory.

"Not Adam Winright's," thought Laura, tensely. "Not trained for vengeance against Adam Winright."

The woman nodded. "Not Harry—you saw Harry, didn't you?" Laura recalled the jaunty young man who had met them when they first came, and seemed so interested in Glory Adair.

"Now, tell me, won't you——?"

Glory's face lit with its most winning smile.

Laura started. This new questioning of Glory's was not a mere sympathetic drawing-out of a woman who nursed a secret; there was definite purpose in it. Even now Glory was not satisfied. She did not mean to leave her till she knew all there was to know, whether or not it had any bearing on the case.

Again Laura was impressed with her own unfitness for such a quest as this.

But Lucile Villard was speaking, telling of her childhood, of her grandfather who traded with the Carib Indians of the Maroni, and of her father, the French captain at the convict station. There was one time that she accompanied her grandfather to the interior as a little child, and was taken by the Indians, and rescued only after months.

"That," said Glory, "was where you learned of the poison?"

Uneasily the woman's eyes questioned hers.

"I saw them make it," she returned at last. "You mean the *querari?* But my father knew of it and had it before then. The Indians used it to tip their arrows and the darts for their blow-pipes. It kills, oh, so quickly! There was no cure for it, the surgeons used to say. They tried cauterizing—burning, you know—but the poison spreads almost instantly. I have seen animals struck with the arrows run not a dozen yards, then drop quite dead." She jerked her thumb downward. "Like that!"

"Your father knew it? The officer?"

"Yes. He brought some with him to Salem, when he left the army. Well, things did not go as they should, so one morning——"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"He poisoned himself?"

"Querari," and the woman almost smiled. "It is a long time ago. I was a chorus girl then. Just before that I had met Harold Winright. He came from a town near the Falls—Manchester, I think they called it. His parents died about then. I thought he was the only son, but in the last days"—she shivered—"he spoke of a brother who had gone to Michigan. I did not see that brother, though, till long afterward."

"You did see my father?"

The woman nodded. "After—after the trouble."

Laura's tender soul shrank from deep probing into these old wounds. But Glory Adair went calmly ahead with her questioning.

Harold Winright, it seemed, had been ambitious.

"He was clever," said Lucile Villard. "I was so beneath him. He would be a great man. I—I was just a woman. And what, after all, is a woman? If she cannot help a man, she should stand aside. But I did not think so then. Then, it hurt."

"Then, you wrote the letter?" Glory was merciless.

Lucile assented.

"You must forgive me. I can never forgive myself. I was ill then, with all the worry and the heart-break. . . . I nearly died, just after. . . . I hardly knew what I did. I had made all kinds of threats. In the madness of the moment I did write that letter. Then I got out the poison. I knew what I meant to do. Yes, I must have been mad . . . quite mad. I thought it could last forever, that hate of mine. It was horrible."

"You would wait twenty-one years——?"

"And my hate did not last that many days."

"But the burrs?"

"The burrs?" The dark eyes searched Glory's face.

"Or thorns. I know of them."

The nurse snapped open her locket.

"Those?" The woman's voice was harsh, her throat suddenly dry, as though she were about to choke. "Those? Oh," and she smiled, a hard smile. "Those, too, came from Cayenne, from the jungles of the Maroni. Now and then the Indians used them instead of darts in their blow-pipes. They have a trick, too, of throwing them with a sling. They are very sharp and they cling to

whatever they touch. Try to brush them off, and so——"

She slapped her hands together.

"They stick, just like that, into your fingers. Many a time when I was with the Indians did I tangle in those burrs. My father brought these with him to Salem. They were among his curios, that he showed to Harold Winright. That was before we were married, just before my father died. None of them was poisoned, then."

"But one was, afterward."

"How do you know?" Intently the woman searched Glory's face. "You know so much of this."

"The poisoned thorn was the twenty-first, the one you meant to send your husband when——"

"When the boy was grown. Oh, yes. It is all past and gone, now. I was wicked—very wicked. There is no use denying. That is what I meant to do. To send one every year, this, that, any way I could, to show him I had not forgotten. . . . Oh, if I'd only had those years to send them! But it all ended so soon."

She gazed with moody eyes far away, seeing neither of the watching women.

"I had threatened. He grew very much afraid of me. He went away to Detroit, saying he was going hunting in Northern Michigan with his brother. But I knew I could find him when I wished; that, year after year, I would never fail to reach him, to remind him of what was coming. I put the burrs in my jewel case, and waited, and watched my baby grow, and planned what he should do.

"The next thing I heard, Harold Winright was dead. Then I broke down, and had to go to the hospital. They knew I had been an actress, and that is how they came to send for Pat Burnville. He played tragedy in a big, roaring way—oh, I can't forget the way he used to play it.

Not Irving, oh, no, but—well, he had a big heart. 'It's all right,' he told them at the hospital. He did not know me at all, except that I'd once been a girl on the stage. At first I was not so ill. Pat Burnville took quite a fancy to the baby. He wanted to take him to his own home. I would not allow that, though. He was very kind. Then I was ill, a long time; and when I was well again, the baby was gone. Where?"

Her tragic eyes seemed to search the sombre years.

"They had thought me dying, had a chance to get it well adopted, had taken the chance—so I made out; but they did not seem to answer my question. Had Pat Burnville taken the boy? I asked him. He seemed to evade me, too. He said he had a boy of his own just about that age. His own boy was in California, with his mother. I often fancied the story about California was just to prevent my seeking, it was so far to go."

"That boy," interpolated Laura, "would be Harry Burnville."

"My baby was called Harold, for his father."

Laura studied the face of the woman a questioning moment, seeking there some suggestion of the alert, black-eyed Burnville. She relinquished her quest at last, unsatisfied.

"Then Mr. Villard came—my lawyer in the case. Pat Burnville had found him, and told him I was ill. He was very kind. He offered to help me search for the boy. We talked it over often after I was convalescent. That hope buoyed me up. I was grateful to Mr. Villard. I would have done anything, anyway, to find the boy——"

Her words trailed away into silence.

"Then?" encouraged Glory.

"Then—then, dear," she turned to Laura, "I first saw your father. He came the day before I left the hospital. He asked to see me. I did not wish to. My bitterness

had died long ago, but . . . oh, I shrank. Yet at last I yielded. He was so like his brother, I thought it must be my husband's ghost walking in on me. Then I saw that his face was hard and stern, and there was no laugh in his eyes. He never smiled; not once. Yet he, too, was kind. My poor husband had left some money. It was all for me. Your father paid my hospital bill. He was sympathetic, though he never looked it; he kept his face always hard and stern, as if it were set in that one mould.

"When I left the hospital he suggested that I come to Detroit. But I would not. I stayed in New York. He went away. He said he would see me again. Once or twice he wrote me. I never wrote him. I was afraid . . . afraid . . ."

"Afraid of what?"

"Afraid I might forget my husband."

Laura waited, expectant, living again in these old times.

"All this while, Mr. Villard was trying to find my boy. He spent much time and work and money. I felt terribly indebted to him, even though he had failed. He was a good man, one of God's own good men." Her eyes brimmed. "One day Adam Winright came to New York and asked me to marry him. I wondered if he thought he cared for me, or if it was merely in atonement for what he fancied his brother had done. Then . . . then I refused him.

"I had already promised to marry Mr. Villard. I told him so. His face never changed. He just kissed my hand. 'I must pay the full price,' he said, and went out. Then I knew that he thought I refused him because of his brother. Yet all the while the memory of Harold Winright seemed pleading with me to yield."

"That," thought Laura, "is why my father, all these years, kept those letters and that picture."

Lucile Villard sighed.

"It is a long time ago," she murmured. "They are all gone, now. Yes, all gone."

Glory Adair sat a moment in silence, as though she held a question on her lips. At last she rose.

"It is too bad," she said, gently, "that we have to call back all these tragic memories. . . . Harold Winright is buried at Detroit?"

Mrs. Villard nodded.

Retracing her steps along the peach-lined Stone Road toward Grimsby village, Laura Winright had a queer sense of coming back to earth from some other planet.

"I mean to see his grave," declared Glory Adair, grimly.

At Detroit, next day, after much search, they found in old newspaper files the brief story of Harold Winright's death and burial. Official records verified them. And at last, in a secluded corner of Woodlawn cemetery, they found a neglected stone:

HAROLD WINRIGHT
April 11, 1864—June 2, 1887.

Glory stared at it harshly. It was as though Palmistry itself lay buried in that grave.

Laura did not smile, yet there was a lilt in her heart. To her, Harold Winright was nothing. They might begin their search once more at the beginning, but—her father's name was unstained, even by the smirch of a divorce. That, to her uncompromising soul, was a very vital thing.

"I'm glad, Glory! You were wrong and I was right—yes, from the first."

Glory gazed at her doggedly.

"Your father's hand did not lie to me. Nor did yours."

Laura could laugh now. But Glory's look checked her laugh.

"And who," added the nurse, "was the woman married to and separated from your father?"

CHAPTER XXII

THE IRRETRIEVABLE STEP

Laura Winright felt elated. To her, Glory Adair's caustic retort was a mere Parthian shot, covering enforced retreat.

Glory's entire castle of fancy had tumbled in ruins. For a solution of the mystery—if there were indeed a mystery—Laura was driven to accept Harry Burnville's commonplace ideas. This man, Webster, had some sort of hold on her father. He had threatened. He had blackmailed, or tried to do so. He had visited the Ghost Room at night. Finally, failing in his threats, he had struck.

True, there was no record of any Andrew Webster, or of money paid to or transactions with Andrew Webster, in her father's books, and her father, as a methodical, careful man would have made note of such dealings. But no! That was merely Glory's theory. If Glory were wrong about the divorce, might not Glory also have been wrong in her interpretation of Adam Winright's real nature? Glory, after all, knew Adam Winright only from repute and from his hand-print, and from a single rencontre. How, then, could she know him as well as the daughter who had known him nearly twenty years?

Of course Glory was wrong. Only Glory's super-abundant, self-assertive confidence in her palm-reading had instilled into Laura's mind a like blind confidence in Glory's theories.

Laura breathed easier when she thought it all out.

Whatever Glory herself might think, except for that one outburst she kept her thoughts to herself. She brought back with her from Grimsby merely an old photograph of Harold Winright, which she persistently studied through her microscope to the exclusion of all else.

"You are beaten?" Laura could not resist the temptation to nag her.

"No. I am still alive."

"Anyway, we do not need to show those letters to Mr. Burnville?"

"No?"

Glory's tone held a question.

"What are you going to do next?" persisted Laura.

No answer.

"Abandon the race?"

"No. Win it."

The nurse laid aside her microscope. The train was whirling them back to Maitland Port; the railroad carriage in which they sat was almost empty. Yet she lowered her voice to a whisper:

"There are some questions still unanswered. For instance——"

"Who was the woman separated from my father?" Laura almost mocked.

"Yes," returned the nurse, seriously. "That's one question. Adam Winright's hand insists on an answer. Then, who was the young man Ross saw coming away from Castle Sunset that night? Mr. Burnville appears to attach no importance to him—why? And—how did a common tramp like Andrew Webster come into possession of this?"

She snapped open her locket, disclosing the poisoned burr.

"Your father must have secured it years ago from Lucile Meloche, possibly while she was ill. He kept it

with him. He knew this burr was poisoned, else it would have done him harm before. He must have kept it separately wrapped. A methodical man—don't toss your head, please! You are sceptical now. You won't be always."

"If," argued Laura, more seriously, "this man visited Dad in the Ghost Room, perhaps Dad showed him the burr——"

"And he purloined it?. Yes, that's reasonable enough. But an ignorant man wouldn't devise so skilful a crime. He was a young man, Ross said. Ross was the only one who mentioned a young man. That point will bear investigating. I must see Ross."

With which she relapsed into brown study.

Laura became uneasily conscious that Glory Adair, in spite of defeat, clung doggedly to her pet theories.

"Has Harry Burnville," suddenly interpolated Glory, "any reason of his own for not pursuing this very pointed clue? The young man, I mean—the man Ross saw leaving Castle Sunset that night? Or," her face clouded, "is Harry Burnville deliberately misleading me? Is that the trail he has been following from the first?"

Laura Winright did not argue.

She had just thought of something else. Once more she had forgotten Tom's request that she see Lawyer Airth. Now it was too late. Detroit was miles behind her.

Then she put Airth out of her thoughts. She was coming back to a new life. Yes, and to Nick Ross.

By the time she reached Maitland Port, she had formed a decision.

"Drive first to the hospital," she told the taxi-driver.

"Oh!" commented Glory. "It is just as well," she presently added, quite imperturbable. "I wanted to ask him some questions."

But Ross was no longer at the hospital. He had left that morning.

"He should not have gone so early," the matron told them, "but—well, he positively insisted."

The thought came to Laura's mind, instantly: "He has gone away." Why she should think that, she could not tell. Yet it seemed that he might go away from Maitland Port. The old car was a wreck. They had not ordered a new one. The chauffeur might be anxious to secure another place. After all, he was merely a chauffeur, and as such, had to work for a living. She, who had never known concern on that point herself, suddenly appreciated the servant's point of view.

Yes, though Ross had been maimed in her service, she had never taken trouble to assure the man that his place was waiting for him.

That prosaic aspect of the situation had never before struck her. Yet anxiety on that point was the only possible explanation of his haste to leave the hospital.

If he had left that morning, however, he might still be at the garage. She telephoned from the hospital, could not get the number, and impatiently hurried out to the waiting taxi.

"I'll stay here," said Glory. "I've just found a most interesting case."

"Take me, quick, to Castle Sunset," commanded Laura Winright.

Only when she was crossing the lawn toward the garage did she feel the first hint of hesitation. It had been easy in the old days to say, "Do this, Ross," or "Drive there, Ross." But now it was different.

At the little gate she halted, challenged by a thought that flashed to her. Harold Winright, thirty years ago, had made just such an unlucky mesalliance as this. He had married a French chorus girl. Laura pondered an

instant on the trouble that had come of that unequal marriage.

"But I'm not marrying any one," she told herself, showing her white teeth in mockery. "I'm going to tell a chauffeur that his job's always here, even if the car is not. . . . Afterward? Well, I'm not an impatient little fool. I can take care of myself."

Her fingers closed on the latch of the gate.

Yet still she hesitated, conjuring up the dread of where this all might end. She was a very human girl, but she had been bred in an aristocratic tradition. Regard for class distinction was a part of her training. "I am not marrying anyone," she repeated to herself; but she knew that after what had happened at Otter Creek, her bidding Ross stay here could have but one meaning in his eyes.

So she stood, running over in her mind the tragedy that had come upon Harold Winright and Lucile Meloche just because they wed in haste without taking count of these things. George Annisford was in her class. Nick Ross was not. Blood counted, and so did education, and so did generations of training—and she knew she would make a horrible, horrible mistake. She saw the girls of her own rank who knew her, the friends she had met in Detroit and abroad, pointing at her, as Harold Winright's friends must have pointed at him thirty years ago.

Again she laughed, shortly.

"Why, even my dad wanted to marry Lucile Meloche! She is a lady—a perfect lady. A little training——"

Again her thoughts took a turn.

"Is it in the Winright blood?" she questioned herself. First her uncle, then her father, and now herself, treading the same dangerous path.

"I don't care," she whispered, in a burst of decision; and opened the gate.

The garage doors were open. Overhead, someone was moving about.

"Ross!" she called.

"Laura Winright!"

He came down the stair, still limping.

"You are packing up?" she accused him.

He grinned.

"If the Ross phonetescope were perfected, I could show you as fine a moving, talking picture of packing up as you could wish. Just take a look, will you?"

She hesitated; then preceded him up the stair. She cast a rueful glance at the disordered room above.

"Why?" she asked. Then, with a touch of hauteur: "Who said you could go?"

"The car's a hopeless wreck. I had an expert in auto diseases diagnose the case while I lay on my back. He brought the remains to town, then the clinic developed into an autopsy. 'Nothing doing till the Resurrection,' says Mr. Expert."

Laura sank into the chair he pushed forward for her.

"That isn't an answer?"

Ross just smiled at her.

"Laura Winright, it's no use pretending. I won't try. There's lots more cars in the world, you're going to say? True for you. Also, there's lots more chauffeurs. But when I leave here, there'll be one less."

"You won't leave."

"No?"

"I won't let you."

She caught herself. Desperately she tried to reassert her position as mistress, to put him in his place as servant.

"Ross, you're too good a chauffeur. Of course we'll have another car right away. Besides, Tom has to be consulted."

"He'll not object."

"What are you going to do?"

Still she tried to play the mistress, but she felt that the rôle was feebly taken.

"I? Oh, I suppose I'll perfect the Ross phonetescope and win fame and fortune." An instant he reverted to the old vein of ironic pleasantry. "I've a new scheme that surpasses them all in possibilities, though. It's a hummer." His tone was eager, as though he would carry all things before him in the sweep of his enthusiasm. "It beats the old phonetescope idea a million miles. Transmitting sight and sound simultaneously *by wireless.* Just think what it means in this war right now. Up there your aëroplane observer with his tiny transmission machine, photographing the enemy's lines thousands of feet below. As he skims along, his instrument visions everything. Yonder, miles away, the general staff watches a screen. The picture of the enemy's lines is laid before them instantly. They see every movement of the enemy's troops at the very moment they move. More than that, they hear every sound."

"Can you do it?" she breathed.

"It can be done. It's just a step aside from the line I've been working on. I can do it—in time. And when I do it, I'll——"

"Make a fortune?"

He laughed.

"I'll give the invention to my country."

"You're joking?"

"Oh, I suppose I am," he muttered, in a tired tone. His enthusiasm faded. "It's been failure and failure and failure, this old phonetescope of mine—failure piled on failure. I guess if this new version of the thing is to decide the war, it won't be invented by me. Anyway," he concluded, "there's something really better. If the

Stars and Stripes are to wave in France I can help fling 'em to the breeze——"

He laughed, cheerily.

"That's a man's job. It's better than pottering about among these things." His sweeping arm scornfully indicated the dismantled work-table. "The man who's fought for his country is equal to the best there is. When I've fought for my country—then, I'll come back——"

Laura Winright shivered.

"And then will be time enough for us to perfect the phonetescope."

He smiled with easy good humour. And she, who in her brief days had seen so much of war—who had watched in old London itself the march of fighting men, and had heard on clear days the distant boom of guns beyond the channel—who had hung, affrighted, on the very fringe of war, yet had bravely pleaded for the right to do a woman's part—she shivered, yet proudly looked at him.

"It's a man's part," she said.

Then she gazed at him in a sombre way. There were many who did not come back.

"Why not?" she breathed.

He drew a step nearer.

"Why not?" he repeated, and took her hands.

Then he laughed, harshly.

"No," he said. "That wouldn't be fair to you or to me. They'd say you'd married beneath you—they'd say I was a fortune-seeker——"

"Do we care?"

He clung sternly to some high, inborn ideal.

"It isn't that. There is a right thing and a wrong thing, and the daughter of Adam Winright must marry a man who has come to count for something. Not merely her father's chauffeur. You see?"

He let go her hands.

"You will wait?" he asked.

"If I must wait . . . You are going—when?"

"Quick as I can. I'll be at the hotel a day or two. There are things to be straightened up here. But I'll be out of this place inside an hour."

"Good-bye," she said.

"Good-bye."

She went down the stair. She passed slowly through the latticed gate. She had hesitated so long there—a shiver of misgiving shot through her now, as she lived again her bitter inner fight.

She had taken a step that was irretrievable.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BROKEN SHACKLES

Laura Winright next morning received a letter from Tom at Detroit:

"You've done it, Sister Laura, or rather, you've failed to do it. To see Lawyer Airth, I mean. You remember I spoke of it when you were here.

"He's been pressing for some time now to see you regarding some matters in connection with the estate. I can't go into details here. I tried to put him off, but he insisted there was no alternative.

"Since you did not come to him, he's coming to you. Look for us on Thursday. Airth is a busy man, of course, and he wanted to bring you down here again; but I insisted that he make the trip to Maitland Port, and he agreed.

"He'll have only a few hours in Maitland Port as he wants to get back the same night, so please be within call."

Laura remembered her promise to Tom that she would see the lawyer. She had promised that day Glory went through the old account-books. It was a mere, mechanical promise; and she had forgotten it the next moment, and remembered it later only to forget it again.

She flushed now; for she took a stern pride in the sanctity of the Winright word.

As to the business, she had no inkling. Airth, she

knew, was making application in Tom's name for letters of administration to Adam Winright's estate. Doubtless there was a lot of red tape in connection with the proceedings, and doubtless she herself must be tangled in some of this red tape.

A postscript to the letter caught her eye:

"P. S. Burnville is back in Detroit, disgusted with his chase. He talked of throwing up the case, but I persuaded him to stick. Mostly, it was talk, I think; for Burnville is not a quitter."

Laura showed the letter to Glory Adair when she called next day from the Barracks.

"No," said Glory, "Harry Burnville is decidedly not a quitter. When he talks of quitting, count on it, Miss Winright, he has almost won his race."

"And you?"

"I? Oh, what can you expect of me? Harry Burnville is a trained criminal-hunter. I am a poor Maitland Port nurse. He pursues criminals. I merely study the lines of this hand and that. I saw Mr. Ross," she concluded.

"Yes?"

"He repeated his former yarn regarding the young man leaving Castle Sunset that night."

"Yarn? You think it's just a yarn?"

Glory's brows lifted.

"I won't say that. He persists, too, that he was in the garage right up to the moment your father telephoned him."

"Do you doubt it?" Laura's tone was hostile.

"I haven't said I doubt it."

Glory Adair looked hard at Laura Winright.

"There is one thing more. Your father wrote you in England, didn't he, that he was ill?"

"That was why I came home."

Laura gripped the arms of the chair in which she sat. She could see it again, that letter which throughout the homeward journey on the liner had burned itself into her memory:

"Laura, you must come home at once. Come by the next boat. I am far from a well man, and there are things I cannot write in a letter, that I must tell you before I die. . . ."

She repeated the words.

"That," she said, "was the first intimation that he was ill. He'd never mentioned it in his earlier letters. Even Tom and Mr. Annisford knew nothing of his illness. Yes, Tom had noticed he seemed worried last October—he told Mr. Burnville so."

"You have those letters?"

"Yes."

"Get them for me."

Laura, wondering, brought them down from her steamer trunk. Glory studied them. The microscope was brought into requisition presently and the study grew more intent.

The nurse rose at last.

"I'm going to Detroit at once. I'll be there to-morrow—Thursday."

"Mr. Airth will be here Thursday."

"That's too bad!" Glory frowned. "I may be back in time to see him, dear, but—I hardly think so."

"But why are you going?"

"To find that young man—the young man Ross saw—if I can. If I can't find him, maybe I'll find some one who will tell me all about him."

She would not stay to argue. Laura Winright pushed the letters into a drawer of the desk.

She was wondering when Ross would come. He had left the rooms over the garage. She had not seen him about. Very likely he was at the hotel. He would come to see her before he left Maitland Port. She knew he would come. If for nothing else, because she wished him to come.

It would be terrible if that matter-of-fact "Good-bye" were to be the end.

Early the next afternoon she again chanced upon the letters. She glanced through them carelessly. The sight of her father's well-remembered hand-writing brought tears to her eyes. That last letter, the letter that told of his illness, sent a shiver through her.

She laid it down, and picked up another.

Then, with a little cry, she compared the two. She fell to picking out the same words in both, the same letters, to studying letter-formations, the loop of a "g," the crossing of the "t's," the twist of an "s."

Impulsively she flung the last letter down upon the desk.

It was a forgery. Glory had discovered that. But Glory had not told her.

Some one else might have written the letter for her father. She paused a moment, deliberating that point. No. She rejected the idea at last. The hand-writing was not his; but it was palpably an attempt to imitate his. It had deceived her at the moment; had her suspicions not been roused by Glory's conduct it might have deceived her even now.

And Glory had not troubled to tell her!

Burnville must know at once. This discovery might be vital. Acting as always on the impulse, she started to frame a telegram.

The next moment, in came Tom Winright, ushering Lawyer Airth.

Daniel Webster Airth, Attorney-at-Law, grasped Laura Winright's soft hand in his cold, flabby paw. He was tall, cadaverous, stooped, with eyes deep set and a nose like the beak of an eagle. He coughed twice before he spoke.

"Pleased, Miss Winright." But his eyes showed no pleasure, only embarrassment.

Tom seemed embarrassed, too. He sat very straight, but his slim fingers nervously twisted the tips of his moustache.

In the awkward silence that ensued, Laura Winright glanced from the one to the other. The lawyer coughed again.

"I presume Mr. Winright told you——"

Tom cut in, harshly.

"I've told her absolutely nothing, Airth, and I refuse to be a party to telling her. You insisted on it being done, and it's up to you to do it. These dirty jobs are lawyers' work. They're not suited to respectable men."

Airth flushed beneath his sallow skin.

"Mr. Winright—ahem!——"

He spent a long time clearing his throat.

"I protest, it is an imperative legal duty. There is absolutely no alternative. I appreciate your attitude—ahem!—but—ahem!—your feeling does you credit——"

He floundered.

"What does all this mean?" demanded Laura.

Tom Winright, still twirling his moustache, frowned on the embarrassed lawyer.

"Talk up, Airth," he at last urged. "Get it over with, for God's sake. It isn't pleasant business for any of us. I hate it, but if it's got to be done, do it."

"Ahem! Ahem! Miss Winright. It appears—ahem!—that your father left no will. Search has been made, here and in Detroit, and Mr. Burnville, who made the search, is prepared to make affidavit that he has found no will."

"I know that. Go on."

"Now, Miss Winright, you understand, where there is no testamentary disposition of an estate—in short, no will—it is obligatory for a surviving relative to take out letters of administration. Mr. Winright"—he turned to Tom—"as the eldest son is entitled to do so in this case. You follow me, Miss Winright? To take out letters of administration, it is necessary for him to furnish a sworn statement regarding the survivors of the decedent entitled to share in the estate. In other words, the heirs. It is necessary, also, to furnish the names of both parents and the birth-dates of these surviving relatives."

"Oh!" breathed Laura Winright, and leaned forward, her eyes fixed on the lawyer's face.

But her fancy saw Nick Ross standing, arms akimbo, amid the debris of his workshop, telling her that they must wait.

Airth hesitated, and coughed again. The girl's tense look alarmed him. She grew impatient of his delays.

"Well, go on, Mr. Airth."

"I was just saying, Miss Winright—ahem!—that a—it is necessary to furnish these certain particulars. Now, the decedent—the late Mr. Winright, you understand?—appears to have been very reticent and to have imparted little or no information on these points; so it became necessary to search the records of Wayne County, Michigan, from which we learned that the late Mr. Winright was married on March 22, 1891, to one Mary Hastings. A son, Thomas Winright, was born to them in June,

1892, and the mother is recorded as having died ten days later. You follow me, Miss Winright?"

"Quite, Mr. Airth." Her tone was unemotional.

She saw Tom fuming, manifestly impatient of the lawyer's slow story, holding himself in check only by a palpable effort.

"Now, it is established by credible evidence, secured by Mr. Burnville, who is acting under instructions from our firm—I beg of you, Miss Winright, to remember that we are merely carrying out our legal duty, even though it is necessarily painful—it is established, I say—ahem!—that you were living here with Tom Winright in 1895. There is at Detroit no record of another marriage by Mr. Winright, the decedent. There is no record of any child of that name being born. In short, there is an absolute lack of any evidence that you were actually the daughter of Adam Winright, the decedent. A—ahem!—a painful situation, I may say. I found it very embarrassing."

He had a spasm of coughing, and wiped his beaked nose with his handkerchief.

Laura Winright waited. Her heart beat rapidly; her whole soul was intent. Yet her face stayed smiling.

"Mr. Airth," she urged kindly, "please go on."

She realized his wondering look.

"You understand, Miss Winright? This much we knew; the late Mrs. Winright died in 1892. She left an only child, a son—in short, Thomas Winright."

Tom Winright looked miserable.

"We faced that situation. Might there be a record elsewhere? It was hardly credible. At this point we discovered that in March, 1895, Adam Winright, the decedent, took as a foster child one Laura Gowan. She appears to have been not even formally adopted, but was taken by him on probation from the Michigan Chil-

dren's Aid, in whose charge she then was. It is not mere presumption, Miss Winright—ahem!—I shall still call you Miss Winright——"

He had another coughing spell. Laura Winright waited, hopefully.

"You understand, Miss Winright?" Himself, Airth could not understand her calmness, her high disdain of this huge calamity. "Thomas Winright is, obviously, the sole legatee of the entire estate of Adam Winright, the decedent. As a foster child, not even formally adopted, in the absence of testamentary provision, you cannot share——"

"He means," put in Tom Winright, impatient of the long agony, "that since nothing was willed you, Laurie, you can't get a blamed cent. But he has to put it in this peculiar legal patter of his, for fear you'll understand. And he's mistaken, Laura. We'll divide things just the same."

"Mr. Winright—ahem!—it is impossible," interposed the lawyer, gravely. "Such things can't be done. The law is strict, and it must be administered, and I regret—ahem!—it is a painful thing for me to say, I do assure you—ahem!—the law positively shuts you out of any share, Miss Winright. You cannot share."

Tom rose, and gripped her hand.

"Mr. Airth," he said, "I just take leave to tell you that you're mistaken. Whatever is mine, is Laura's, as long as the sun shines on us both."

Still Laura sat silent.

Realization was coming slowly. Adam Winright was not her father. Adam Winright could not be her father. What the old records at the Winright store had vaguely hinted, what the verbose lawyer had been trying to tell her, at last grew clear. Adam Winright was not her father. . . . Yet, across the years, beyond the grave, she

still loved old Adam Winright, who had held her on his knee.

As for the money, it did not matter.

Nay, it had always mattered; and its vanishing mattered now. These many days it had lain a burden on her soul. She rose, with a sharp gesture, and radiant happiness shining in her blue eyes.

"No, Tom," she said, simply, "if it's not mine, I won't take it."

"Laura! I say, Laura!"

"I'm not sorry, Tom. I'm glad! I'm glad! It's a burden lifted from me. Don't try to change me, for you can't. I'm free. I'm glad to be free. Thank you. Thank you, both."

"But—Laura——"

"No, no. It's all right. I can make my way, Tom. It won't hurt me to work for a living. I'll go right away."

She rose.

"This very night, Tom. That is all, Mr. Airth? Then good-bye, and thank you."

She went out, leaving them staring.

She remembered, as she came into the sunlight of the lawn, that other day she had let George Annisford go, and she had gone racing down to the cliff edge, joying in the breaking of her chains.

She laughed to the sunlight. Then, with a keen ear, she caught a familiar sound that she had not heard for days. It came from the garage, the familiar clink of tools on metal.

She ran across the lawn to the lattice gate.

Nick Ross glanced up as she entered. He was on hands and knees, dusty and greasy, unwiring the model

phonetescope from the work-bench he had brought downstairs.

"Nick!" she cried.

"Laura Winright! I almost forgot the be-all and end-all of my existence—the famous Ross phonetescope, destined to put the photoplay business where it belongs and to revolutionize the art of war."

He grinned.

"Nick!" She bent over him like a hovering bird. "Just guess what's happened?"

"I couldn't in a thousand years. But you look perfectly radiant. It must be good. Did you find a nickel?"

"Better than that." Her exuberance echoed his. "I lost a fortune."

She told him, in a few words; then waited, with a sudden sinking of the heart. Might he be, after all, merely the fortune-hunter he had pictured himself? All her new-found world of happiness hung trembling in the balance.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "Laura?"

His tone held a question. His arms clasped her. His lips met hers.

"Laura?" he repeated.

Laughing, she pushed him away.

"Now, I must go over to the house and pack, and make ready to go out into the world and earn my living like any other poor working girl. . . . But I'll see you often. . . ."

"Always."

She frowned; then laughed away the frown.

"Just look!" she exclaimed. "Look what you've done to my white waist with those greasy hands. And now that I'm a working girl and everything's so high, I must be careful of my white waists. Ugh!"

She ran gaily across the lawn to Castle Sunset, Nick's

happy laugh pursuing her. Her eyes fell on the French windows of the Ghost Room, and her lithe figure stiffened.

There was one thing still left her to do here. She had to find the man who had killed Adam Winright—Adam Winright, who had been her father.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE HAND OF NICK ROSS

Laura Winright closed the door behind her, solemnly as though, with it, she closed a chapter in her life.

Indeed, that was what she did. She realized the fact when she halted inside the door.

Through its stained-glass panes, little rays of coloured light streamed into the shadowy hall, weaving a bright new pattern in the old carpet. The place had all the silence of a sanctuary, and all its impressive shade. Laura Winright's soul, storm-tossed through the hour just gone, found eager rest in its peace.

She passed slowly along the hall, wondering. Memories of her father rose at every step. Her father? Adam Winright was not her father, never had been! Yet he had lain dead in that room, and she with trembling fingers had lifted the white sheet that covered him, had clutched his dead hand, had turned the palm to the light.

Swiftly she glided into the room, and knelt there. Impulsive tears leapt to her eyes. Before all things she was bound to avenge him; bound to discover the truth of how he died; doubly bound now that she knew in him no longer a father, but just a benefactor.

"But what can I do, now?" In sudden illumination she recognized her helplessness, stripped of everything that could buy assistance. Her hands clenched. "I shall go on alone," she told herself. "Even if no one helps me, I shall go on. Tom may give up, but I never will. Never."

She rose, dry-eyed now.

"I must be late," she reflected, practically. "No time to dress for dinner." Then she recalled that this would probably be her last meal in Castle Sunset.

She laughed at the thought of dinner. She could just as easily have wept. Through the untasted meal she sat opposite Tom, engrossed in silent thought.

"Mr. Airth has gone?" she asked, presently.

Tom nodded.

"Why did you run away like that?" he added.

"I was excited, I suppose. It felt so good to be quite free of it all."

He stared at her, evidently puzzled by her mood. She rose, and came to him.

"Tom, dear boy, you'll never understand, I suppose. Money's a great thing, but there are things worth more than money." She laughed, softly. "I have won something. . . . I don't mind the price." She sat down again, too excited to more than nibble at the food Mrs. MacTurk put before her.

"Mamma Judy," she announced, "I'm going away."

Tom waited till the old woman was beyond earshot.

"See here, Laura," he urged, "that's all bosh about your going away. You're not so foolish as all that? Why, this place has always been your home. It always will be, while I have the say. That fool lawyer made me tired," he added, with a show of irritability. "As if we couldn't have gone ahead, divided everything, and got along quite comfortably. Even if there is no will, is there a bit of doubt as to what dad meant to do?"

"There's no doubt, anyway, about what *I* mean to do."

"You're going?"

"Yes."

"It's sheer foolishness."

She leaned across the table. He interrupted her with a question.

"See here, Laura, is there anything between you and Annisford?"

She smiled.

"I'm going to marry Nick Ross."

"The devil you are! You! A Winright!" Tom was actually perturbed.

"But I'm not a Winright."

"Oh, bosh!"

There was, she felt, no use arguing with him. But she was her own mistress.

"I'm going to pack my things," she announced, as she rose from the table. "Then I'll kiss you good-bye."

His response surprised her. He merely laughed, indifferently.

"By all means. I daresay you'll be back in a week I'll have Mamma Judy keep your room ready for you."

His eyes were cold. There was no smile in them. She was startled. Was he glad to have her go?

She had sat there, dawdling over the dinner, longer than she thought. A glance down the long hall told her that. The level rays of the declining sun streamed through the open door of the Ghost Room at the very end of the hall. With her foot already on the bottom step of the stair, she halted.

She would see one more Huron sunset from the west porch, and then—then she would go.

She turned from the stair, and went on through the Ghost Room. The French windows stood open. A cooling breeze swept through them, fanning her cheek. She realized how feverishly excited she had been.

Did she really understand it all? She asked herself that question as, sinking into her father's arm chair, she stared out upon the red and gold of the lake. Thus she had often sat, as a child, on summer evenings, on Adam Winright's knee.

The hour and the place called up many memories of him. The light slowly died out of the west. Laura glanced about her, startled, almost fancying she could see him sitting across the table from her, or moving slowly along the shelves, searching with peering eyes for some favourite book.

She shivered, though the summer night was warm. Desperately she tried to think of Nick Ross; but at every turn her mind confronted the haunting image of Adam Winright—Adam Winright, who had been kind to her, who had loved her as his own child, who had dandled her—yes, and whom she had found here, dead, in this self-same chair, the night she reached home from England.

It was just at this hour.

She put her hands over her eyes, as though to shut out a horrifying vision. Cold chills coursed through her. The sun had gone, and the lake lay dark at the foot of the cliff. Spectral shapes danced on the lawn, and went slinking along the cedars. Perhaps the man in grey was prowling there. Terrors filled her girlish soul, terrors that the hands pressed tight over her eyes could not shut out.

She rose, shaking in every limb, and turned on the lights. She took a few steps toward the windows, still wide open, thinking to close them: then halted, fearful of what might lurk in the darkness outside. She sat there, bathed in light, drawing from it what comfort she could, haunted by memories.

Half turning, she glanced toward the far corner. The Ross phonetescope was gone. Laura started. The black-mouthed instrument with its circling lenses had vanished from its place. She stared at the spot a long time; then, curiosity getting the better of her cowardice, she crossed to it, and scrutinized the wall.

Then, feeling a bit more cheerful for the light, she moved slowly toward the fire-place. It was here in the ashes that Glory had found the poisoned burr. The thought of the tragedy, now months gone, made her blood run cold. Try as she might to shut it out with other, more cheerful thoughts, it persisted in recurring. This bit of evidence and that came up, and her mind insisted on piecing them together—the night of her home-coming, the chauffeur meeting them at the station, her father's death, herself walking in her sleep, overhearing Chalmers' words, visiting the room where her father lay dead.

Her eyes wide with terror, she stared into the mirror above the mantel. Then, with a sudden cry, she clutched her sleeve.

For the first time she found it easy to think of Ross. She remembered his arms around her, his greasy hands, her laughing words in parting, and—terror-stricken, she stared at the black hand-print that seemed to mirror the hand-print of the telegram.

She fancied a distant foot-step in the hallway.

Quickly she drew from her bosom the telegram she had always carried. She unfolded the yellow sheet; she stared at the hand-print marked there; then, shiveringly, glanced toward the mirrored sleeve.

Joy glowed in her soul.

"Thank God," she whispered. "They aren't the same." In her gladness, she could have kissed the greasy stain on her sleeve. She drew it toward her, and uttered another cry.

What she had thought dissimilar lines was merely the mesh of the goods. She drew the sleeve tight, no longer trusting the mirrored image. Relentlessly she compared the two hand-prints.

That deep-marked line pointing to the base of the index

finger was the same on both. It bore the identical message to her soul.

A choking sound escaped her. She snatched a match from the mantel, and with passionate fingers struck it.

"This is all there is," she muttered. She held the telegram toward the tiny flame.

Footsteps sounded behind her. She turned, nervously; the match burned her fingers. Hastily she dropped it.

"Miss Winright!"

Katie stood in the doorway. Laura Winright crumpled the telegram.

"What am I doing?" she muttered, blankly. "What am I doing?"

With a wild cry she sank on her knees before the fireplace. The timid girl stared at her in affright.

"Oh, God, I can't believe it—I won't believe it. Perhaps——"

Her soul caught hungrily at a straw of hope.

And yet—there stood before her, stern, unalterable, as though carved in everlasting granite, that cruel line, a silent witness against Nick Ross. Bit by bit there sprang forth from it little incidents, linking themselves into a chain, that every instant encircled Nick Ross the more relentlessly.

"Miss Winright! Miss Laura!" The girl was fairly wringing her hands.

Laura heard without understanding.

"I never dreamed," she muttered, her agonized thoughts half spoken. "I never thought of him. And yet—he was the one man here at that hour. He was the one man at every hour within reach of Castle Sunset."

She saw in fancy Nick Ross arrive at the station, hurried, perturbed—Nick Ross, late, apologizing for his lateness, trying by dint of much repeated detail to fix the hour and minute in her memory. She saw his face,

white and agitated, in the arc-light's radiance. He had admitted being in the garage, in the grounds, for all of three hours before her father died. He had told of a young man leaving Castle Sunset at that hour—a young man no one else had seen. The Man in Grey, coming and going as he chose, appearing mysteriously, vanishing quickly, must be an accomplice—she had not thought of that! That—her mind worked quickly—that would explain why at one turn the criminal seemed a poor roustabout, and again gave hint of being a man of culture.

Then there was Adam Winright's palpable interest in Ross and his work—the young fellow's carelessness regarding his duties as chauffeur—his impudence, that had at once angered and charmed her—his free comings and goings—all these things betokening a man with a death-grip on the Winright good name.

Hurriedly, confusedly, the girl pieced together little bits of fact into a chain. A cry burst from her.

"He is the one—the only one who could have done it. And—his hand! Oh, God, he is the man!"

"Miss Winright!"

Laura rose, no longer trembling, her face set.

"What is it, Katie?"

Her tone was dry; her manner hard, as though she would brush aside this interruption, in order to hasten her work of vengeance. At every breath Adam Winright seemed crying out to her. She must do this thing, whatever pangs it cost.

"If you please, miss, Ross——"

"Ross?"

"He's waiting to see you, miss."

Katie welcomed the palpable return of her mistress to sanity.

"Ross." Laura's tone grew harsh, with no hint of wavering. "I'll see Ross. Just tell him to come here."

CHAPTER XXV

THE MAN IN THE GHOST ROOM

Glory Adair reached Detroit too late at night to visit the Winright offices. She spent the next morning there, secured the time-clock records for many months, and made a number of notes from them.

Then she serenely accepted George Annisford's invitation to lunch with him at the grill-room; and spent a good share of the lunch hour in unobtrusive study of his hands.

After leaving Annisford, she spent an hour or more shopping, apparently quite oblivious of any serious mission.

Her shopping done, she went to Harry Burnville's office on Woodward Avenue.

Pat Burnville, smoking assiduously at his reeky pipe, sat disconsolate in the ante-chamber. The nurse's quick mind grasped instantly what that meant. She stalked past the old man, and, without prefatory knock, opened the door of the private office.

Harry Burnville glanced up from his desk, a touch of annoyance in his black eyes. Then a smile chased the frown.

"Miss Adair! I'm immensely pleased!"

She accepted the proffered chair, and went straight to business. Her eyes never left his face.

"You have Mrs. MacTurk's ghost book?"

"Yes."

"Will you let me see it?"

"With pleasure."

Glory Adair glanced through it, and carelessly handed it back.

"Thank you. Now, I want you to come to Maitland Port with me—at once."

"At once? A rather large order, Miss Adair!"

The detective spoke pleasantly; his face gave no hint of perturbation. Glory Adair did not relent.

"A rather large order," Burnville repeated. "Still, I am adept at filling large orders. Only—why?"

"In fairness to yourself. Also, as a favour to me. I want you to testify when I unfold the true story of the Winright murder."

"Murder?" Burnville rose. "Then you do believe it is murder?"

She nodded.

The detective, clasping his hands behind him, eyed the young woman with unalloyed admiration. She seemed to quite enjoy his homage.

"You are my antagonist in this enquiry?"

"I was."

"Was? That signifies——?"

"That the enquiry is closed."

Burnville laughed, musically.

"You think so? . . . What if I refuse to help?"

"That is the charming feature of the situation, Mr. Burnville. In justice to yourself, you can't refuse. Remember, I am asking you to volunteer a private statement to—well, to Mr. and Miss Winright, and to myself." She paused a moment. "If you compel me, I can, of course, finish my case quite independent of you. Still, I fancied you would appreciate my proposal."

Burnville made no immediate answer in words. He crossed to the bevelled mirror on the further wall.

"You will pardon me, Miss Adair," he remarked, "but

the urgency of the train schedule compels a very hurried preparation for my trip."

With a few deft movements of brush and comb, he slicked his hair into becoming form. He twisted his black moustache to the correct curl, and whisked a few almost invisible specks of dust from his natty summer suit. An instant he debated his collar and cuffs; then sighed resignedly.

"I am at your service, Miss Adair." He picked up her hand-bag for her. "We have twenty minutes to catch the train."

"Eighteen," corrected the nurse, requisitioning the wrist-watch. "The train time has been changed; and, you see, I scheduled myself to return by this particular train."

Burnville smiled, admiringly.

"I presume," he observed, when they were seated in the railway carriage, "you will vouchsafe no light on your solution of the problem?"

"The presumption is accurate. I move in a silent and mysterious way. Publicity sometimes helps; but this time it comes when my case is finished."

His look revealed manifest admiration of her cool serenity.

From that moment, throughout the four hours' journey, he resigned himself to the relentless fate she sweetly personified. Their chat was middle distance between cool and friendly, but concerned itself with commonplaces only, never venturing close to the one subject uppermost in both minds.

It was near twilight when the train swept past Salkeld's Bush. An instant later the monotonous song of the Maitland Rapids smote Glory's ears. From the window she gazed queerly into the gaping river valley. The man's eyes followed her slightest movement.

"And," he enquired, in a dead whisper, "how soon after you reach Castle Sunset will you—ah—lift the veil?"

"Within an hour."

"Then I accompany you direct to Castle Sunset?"

"That is the programme."

She took up her portfolio. "This," she mocked, "is valuable—very. It contains several vital links in my chain of evidence."

With grave politeness Burnville assisted her to alight. Through the taxi-ride to Castle Sunset both sat silent. The girl's fair face wrinkled occasionally into a frown; but no word of her absorbing thoughts escaped her.

"Within an hour, you said?"

She glanced up. They were at their destination. "There is Nick Ross!" She pointed toward the front porch. "He's just going in. And here comes Tom!"

The young fellow sauntered down the walk to meet them.

"You are shivering?" whispered Burnville to the nurse, as the taxi-driver helped her down.

"Am I?" she challenged.

"Evening, Miss Adair," drawled Tom. "How are you, Burnville?" He drew closer. "Any developments?" he whispered.

Miss Adair had preceded them up the walk. Burnville shot a quick glance after her.

"*I* have none."

Tom's brows lifted. The detective passed on to join Glory Adair. Burnville felt that Tom watched them curiously, but he did not glance back. As he ascended the front steps, Miss Adair laid her hand on his arm.

"This way, please!"

"Why, may I ask?"

"I hear voices."

She stole quietly along the vine-shaded porch, making the half circuit of the house to the west wing and the open French windows of the library.

"Wait here!" she commanded.

She shot a backward glance at Tom, still lingering at the gate; then snuggled into concealment behind the veil of vines. Burnville whispered a deprecatory protest.

Glory's smile defied him.

Herself unseen, she gazed into the Ghost Room. The lights were all agleam. Before the fire-place stood Laura Winright, her slim figure all a-quiver, her face set in stern, hard lines.

Nick Ross, a dozen paces distant, gazed at her, a question in his eyes.

"This gets quite past me!"

To the listener amid the vines, the drawling insouciance of other days was gone.

"Must I tell you everything?" challenged Laura.

"Tell me, Laura Winright. Then maybe I'll understand."

The old insolence had vanished from his tones; it lingered in his words. Laura's slim figure swayed. Nick Ross, with arms outstretched, stepped toward her.

"No, no! Don't come near me!" Gripping the edge of the mantel she steadied herself.

"Listen," she went on. "Here, that night, I found my father—dead." Her voice rose to a cry of pain. "I came down here afterward—guided by an avenging providence. I found evidence that a man had been in this room with my father a few minutes before he died. Yet that man gave no alarm! He did not come forward to tell what happened!"

An angry light flashed into Glory's eyes.

Laura's words impetuously rushed forth: "You took us to Castle Sunset that night—Mr. Annisford and my-

self. That's true. But you were late. And for two hours before my father died, you say you were at the garage. For that, we have your word. You say a young man left Castle Sunset. For that, too, we have your word. It is since you have been here that these ghosts have been seen—that this man in grey has come —that all these troubles have fallen on us. You say my father was generous to you. Why?"

"Honest to goodness, Laura Winright——"

"Don't! Don't!" she cried. "Whoever that man was, he knew Castle Sunset. You are the only man who could have been here. Tom in Detroit—Mr. Annisford with me—if not you, who *was* the man? Who was the man whose hand-print is on this telegram I found here the night my father—the night Adam Winright died?"

She spread the yellow sheet accusingly before him.

"Look at it," she cried. "And look at this!"

She caught her own white sleeve, and drew it tight. She leaned forward that he might see the better.

"That print is yours—yours from this very afternoon. Here—see—here is that deep line pointing to the index finger. Can you deny that line? If you can't, will you dare deny——?"

"I do deny!"

Glory Adair, intently listening, heard the quick intaking of the man's breath.

With an inarticulate cry, Laura Winright dropped the telegram. She laid her hands on the chauffeur's shoulders; she looked into his eyes.

"I'd give the world to believe you. Don't you know that? Wasn't I glad this afternoon to give up Castle Sunset—a fortune—an honoured name—for you? Wouldn't I give my life for you—right now, gladly, to know that you were innocent? I'd suffer all this heartbreak without a pang, if I knew you spoke the truth.

But I can't believe you innocent when your own hand bears witness against you."

Nick Ross stood silent under her accusing gaze.

"Only tell me," she pleaded, "tell me why——"

"I was not here that night," he answered, doggedly.

"Don't! Don't!" Laura's voice choked a moment. "I can't believe that. Don't try to tell me. Is it punishment you fear?" She dropped her hands. "Then I withhold it. I let you go free. Only tell me the truth, and break my heart—then go."

She stepped sharply back.

"Go!" she repeated.

Through the open window she pointed to the outer darkness. Nick Ross smiled faintly.

"Ah, but I'm not going!" The old insouciance crept into his manner. "Not till Laura Winright goes with me."

"Oh!" cried Laura, flaming.

Glory Adair clutched Burnville's sleeve.

"This has gone far enough!" she whispered. "Come!"

She swept imperiously into the room.

"Laura, are you mad?" Her voice rang clear in the awe-struck silence.

Laura glanced at her wildly.

"Glory, you shall not—must not—stop me! I have found the man who was in the Ghost Room." She pointed an accusing finger at Nick Ross. "Mr. Burnville"—she turned to the detective—"you must arrest that man for the murder of—of my father."

"Miss Winright——"

She interrupted the detective's hurried protest.

"I take full responsibility, Mr. Burnville." She had forgotten she was no longer the great lady, with the Winright fortune back of her.

Burnville did not move. A queer smile flitted across

Miss Adair's fair face. Laura, frowning, waited an impatient moment.

"Mr. Burnville!" she repeated.

Glory Adair glanced at the detective. He smiled, darkly. The nurse, stooping, picked up the telegram from the carpet.

"Let me see your hand, Ross," she said.

"Glory!" protested Laura.

Glory whirled on her. For the first and last time Laura Winright saw anger—genuine anger—in the placid eyes.

"Laura Winright!" The tone was passionate. "What do you know of the lines of the hand? What training have you? Just enough to fancy that because you find a single line that corresponds in two hands, they both are identical—when every line must match." She fairly bit off her words. "Here"—she snatched the chauffeur's hand—"compare this with the telegram. Of course they're alike, you say. Hasn't each hand five fingers, and hasn't each hand that deep line running upward toward the index? Child! Child!" She dropped the hand. "Even if this man's hand did correspond, Mr. Burnville must let him go in peace. You can't make a deliberate murderer out of a man who hasn't deliberate murder written in his hand."

The eyes of all were on her. Her soul glowed. Hers by right of daring capture was the centre of the stage.

"Glory," cried Laura, wavering between anger and doubt. "If you know, tell me—tell me now—who was the man in the Ghost Room?"

Glory Adair smiled.

"It is only generous to allow the man in the Ghost Room to reveal himself and tell his own story." She stood silent a moment; then bowed:

"Mr. Burnville."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE STILL UNSOLVED PROBLEM

"I can tell what happened that night," began Burnville, "or I can give the entire story from the beginning—what I consider the beginning?" His glance questioned the nurse.

"From the beginning."

Laura assented, nervously.

"My father is Pat Burnville." The detective seemed groping his way. "You've met him. He's inexplicable—quite. Nevertheless, he's my father. After all's said and done, Miss Winright"—he turned to Laura—"though Pat Burnville has lived by his wits, he has a lot of good points. He was very fond of me. And, through all our vicissitudes together, when I was a motherless boy growing up in all sorts of places, Pat Burnville did for me according to his lights. He gave me a bit of an education. He tried to make me—well, better than I might have been."

He paused. Laura had not anticipated this beginning.

"Instead of becoming a criminal, I became a hunter of criminals—with some success."

Glory nodded. "The Morand murder case proves that," she commented, magnanimously.

Burnville bowed his acknowledgments.

To Laura, this by-play was all mystery. Of the Morand murder case she knew little. The passage quickened vague suspicions that had first stirred when these two appeared together.

"My first mention of the name of Winright," pursued Burnville, "came from Pat. I always called him Pat, never father. I was about twenty, showing traces of ambition, and Pat was proud of me. One day he sat surveying me with those searching old eyes of his.

" 'Me boy,' he said, 'there's a game you could play to profit'—and I well remember his look. 'There's a man named Winright, dead or alive, somewhere; and wherever he was or is, there's money, and it's his money. He had a son that I saw as a baby, and whether the boy's alive or dead, or where he is, I wouldn't care to venture, and I wouldn't say I didn't know. He's lost—that's all I'll say. But—see here, Harry. That boy was your age, almost to a day; I wouldn't be sure it wasn't exactly to a day. And when you were a baby I held that boy in my arms—yes, and when he was taken away while his mother was ill, after she came to herself she thought I took him. She hounded me for a long, long time to find out where he was. Right now, Harry, she more than suspects you're her boy. She believes it, Harry. She knows it. If I swore to it, she'd go right into the witness box and swear to it, too. That's the way she feels.'

"I can feel again the queer sensation that came over me when he told me that. He had some mighty fine qualities, had Pat, and some mighty bad ones—and I'm the same mixture, I daresay. But this proposal jolted me.

" 'No,' I told him. 'I won't play that game.'

"Instead of being disappointed, he laughed and clapped me on the shoulder.

" 'All right,' he said. 'You're the undertaker.'

"He never referred to the proposition again. But I never forgot. The name stuck in my memory. When at Newport a year ago I met Tom Winright, I said to myself, 'This is the son.'

"By that time I'd made a name for myself in my pro-

fession, though wherever I went I tried to keep my identity quiet. Tom Winright learned what I was and put himself out to be agreeable to me—and after what Pat had said, I was curious and didn't shun the acquaintance. I accepted Tom's invitation to visit Detroit. He urged me to locate there—had work for me, he said. I thought, anyway, it was a good location, and did open an office last winter, and had a few good strokes of business that helped me to get a foothold. Tom Winright put me up at his clubs, and used to sit up with me at nights swapping stories of crime—particularly murders, forgeries and big cases. He seemed to know every big case in recent years. He was keenly interested in detective work.

"Occasionally he mentioned Maitland Port, where he had been brought up. He wanted me to see the place. In May——"

"To be specific," put in Glory, "on the twentieth of May——"

"On the twentieth of May," agreed Burnville, "Tom had a particular talk with me.

" 'The governor is worrying over something,' he said. 'I can see it, and it bothers me. I don't know what to make of it. I've asked him half a dozen times. He says there's nothing wrong. Well, I'm just willing to swear that he's holding back something.'

" 'He isn't getting any German spy warnings, is he?' I asked, jokingly. The papers were full just then of spy scares.

" 'I don't think it's that,' he said. 'But there's surely something preying on his mind. He doesn't look at all well.' He hesitated a moment, then he added: 'There's been an old fellow who looks like a disreputable longshoreman hanging about the place at Maitland Port, and he may have a bit to do with dad's worry. I've never

seen him, but Nick Ross mentioned him when I was up one week-end.' "

Ross nodded.

"I could see," went on Burnville, "that Tom was himself worried; and when Tom shows worry, there's something wrong. Finally he suggested that I call on his father and proffer my assistance.

" 'That isn't according to professional etiquette,' I told him. 'He should come to me for help. If you'll mention me——'

"He cut in quickly: 'I tell you what, Burnville, you run up to Maitland Port on the twenty-fourth and I'll go up too. I'll take you around and introduce you, and we'll have a show down on the spot.'

"I agreed to that. I went up on Monday morning, the twenty-fourth, anticipating that Tom had been there for the week-end and would stay over. I telephoned the house. Tom was not there. That puzzled me. The housekeeper told me he had not come home. I used the long-distance telephone at once to get Detroit. Tom Winright himself answered. He was all apologies.

" 'Annisford has to go to New York to meet Laura,' he told me. 'I simply can't get away. Stay over till to-morrow, won't you? I'll try to make the run up to-night. Or I'll 'phone the governor. Yes, I'll 'phone the governor right away and tell him to look you up.' Then he rang off, and I simply waited.

"I stayed on till the twenty-fifth. Tom did not come. I got tired of waiting and decided to go back on the last train that night, leaving about 8.15. I had dinner that evening at the hotel, as usual. When I came down to pay my bill, before leaving, the clerk handed me a letter. It had come through the mail, he said.

"Just then I had a long-distance call from Tom at Detroit. He told me that he'd called the governor, and

the governor wanted him to put off investigating; begged him, in fact. 'You'd better come back here, Harry, to-night,' he told me. 'The governor felt very badly about it. We'll talk it over when you come down here, and we'll see if there's any way to get at the root of the matter.'

"I was a bit annoyed, to be sent on such a wild-goose chase. Then I remembered the envelope the clerk had handed me. I opened it. Inside I found a sealed telegram addressed to Adam Winright."

Laura, leaning eagerly forward, resented Glory's impeding question:

"Have you the envelope?"

"No, Miss Adair. I tore it up and threw it into the waste basket. But," he went on, "I took notice. The address was typewritten, in black, in the ordinary pica type used on ninety per cent of the business machines. The envelope was an ordinary No. 7 of white sized paper without watermark. There was no return card. The envelope had been mailed at Maitland Port, and bore one cent postage."

"And the post-mark?"

"It did not show the hour—merely p. m."

"And what did you think?"

Burnville frowned.

"Honestly, Miss Adair, I was bewildered. That's all there was to it. I had been around town two days, had met a few people, discussed the Winrights, mentioned that I knew Tom. Maybe some one I had met had found this telegram, and, being in a hurry, had mailed it to me and— Just there, Miss Adair, that hypothesis collapsed. Then I thought of the disreputable longshoreman Tom had mentioned. He might have a hand in this. That seemed more plausible.

"I hadn't time, anyway, to puzzle out the mystery. The

only honest thing was to deliver the telegram to its rightful owner. I tried to find a messenger. Of course there wasn't any to be got. Then I remembered that the Winright home was just a block or two out of my way, going to the station. I decided to deliver the telegram myself."

He paused. His listeners waited, breathless.

"I found I had just time to do that and catch the train. If anything happened to stop me—to delay me a few minutes—I'd not be able to get away that night. The one thing I thought of was the need of haste.

"I reached here within ten minutes after leaving the hotel. It was nearly eight. I rang the bell. No one answered. I rang again. No one answered. Then I decided there was nobody home. The situation was embarrassing. It disgusted me. My dominant idea was to get rid of the telegram and to catch the train.

"From Tom's talk I knew that the room in the west wing, at the end of the hall, was Mr. Winright's library. The door was open, and I saw a fire in the grate. I stepped along the hall briskly, making all the noise I could, heard some one in there talking, tapped at the half-open door, and Mr. Winright said, 'Come in!' I heard the whirring of the machine in the corner. Mr. Winright had been talking into it. I handed him the telegram."

"There was no one else in the room?" questioned Miss Adair.

"I saw no one."

The nurse nodded.

"Go on," she said.

"Mr. Winright said, 'A telegram? Thank you. Will you stop that machine in the corner? Just press down the lever and——'

"I found the lever before he had time to tell where it

was. I had not spoken. I removed the record and placed it on top of the machine. In doing so, my hands became greasy. I saw a paper on the table and instinctively snatched it to wipe my hands. Mr. Winright was telephoning the station to see if the train was on time. 'I'd better call Nick,' he said.

"It was not yet dark outside; in the room the lights had not been turned on. He crossed to the box in the corner. He seemed rather excited; very much excited, indeed. I tried to explain my presence and to hand him a card, but could find none, so I told him who I was. 'Yes, yes,' he said. 'I must call Nick. Good-night and thank you.'

"I took the hint. Besides, I didn't want to miss the train. I went out. He sat in front of the black box, talking; and then I heard the record fall and break to pieces. He must have accidentally pushed it off in his excitement."

"When you left he seemed in good health?"

"Yes, Miss Adair, but very much excited—just bubbling over with excitement. If you'll pardon the comparison, he seemed like a man who had taken his first glass of champagne. I presumed the message, which I had not read, was the cause.

"As I stepped out the front door, I glanced across the lawn, meditating a short cut. I saw a light upstairs in the garage. Then the light went out. I passed the corner. The double doors of the garage were open and the chauffeur was cranking the car. It passed me later on the way to the station. So that"—he turned to Nick Ross—"I can exculpate this young man completely. He certainly was not in the library after I was there. I caught the train just as it pulled out. The car was then at the station, and the chauffeur"—again he indicated Ross—"was helping Miss Winright to her seat."

"Then," whispered Laura, "when you left Dad, he was perfectly well? He showed no signs of illness?"

"None whatever. Except that the telegram had so excited him that he paid no attention to me. He seemed engrossed by the idea that you might reach home that night."

Glory interposed.

"When you handled the sealed telegram—which of course you did not open——"

Burnville nodded.

"—did you notice that it contained something about the size of a piece of sawdust, and quite hard? And sharp?"

Burnville pondered.

"There was a little lump, a very tiny lump; I thought it had formed where the paper inside was badly folded. If it were sharp, the point did not penetrate the envelope fully."

Laura ventured a timid question.

"Why did you not tell us all this before, Mr. Burnville?"

Burnville regarded the carpet.

"In our business," he said at last, "we do not tell all we know. To have told then would have put me in an anomalous position—just as it does now. If there were murder, which I did not think, I might have trouble. Furthermore, I had a palpable rival in this investigation." He bowed with courtly grace to Miss Adair. "She showed her hand at the very outset. If the information I possessed had any bearing on the enquiry, I decided to monopolize it. As, I daresay, Miss Adair did with any information she secured independently of me."

"Of course." Glory Adair curtseyed.

"And that is the entire story, Mr. Burnville?" she added.

"The entire story."

"The complete evidence of the man who was in the Ghost Room that night alone with Adam Winright—the man whose hand-print is on this telegram——?"

"Yes."

Laura stared, dumfounded.

"And if Mr. Winright were murdered, you do not know—you cannot tell us—who did it—or how?"

Burnville meditated.

"I might suspect," he returned. "But, as a matter of actual evidence,—no, I cannot tell."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE HEIR OF CASTLE SUNSET

"Now, Miss Adair!" challenged Burnville.

She eyed him steadily.

"I have made a clean breast of everything. Will you own up, too?"

"No."

"You believe Adam Winright was killed?"

"I know he was."

"Who killed him?"

"Three different agencies. You were one of them."

"I!" The detective was incredulous.

"You were an unconscious agent. I acquit you of all intent. Here was a second, unconscious agent."

Snapping open her locket, she shook the twenty-first burr lightly upon the table. It lay, a dull spot, upon the polished wood.

Burnville stared at it, amazed.

"You mean, that was the weapon?" Surprised himself, he was yet more bewildered that Laura Winright showed no surprise whatever. "Why, that's just a little burr. You mean—poisoned?"

She nodded.

"If you wish—be very careful, don't use your fingers—you can fit the points exactly into these little indentations in the telegram. You carried that telegram. It contained the burr. And the burr, as Laura and I know, *killed* Adam Winright."

At her words, Burnville whitened.

"Miss Winright!" he began to protest; but a certain pride silenced him.

"That was why the Man in Grey represented himself to the messenger as Adam Winright, and signed for the telegram on the morning of the twenty-fifth of May. That is why, after receiving the telegram, he mailed it to you at your hotel—knowing that, however perplexed, you would do the one honest thing and hand the telegram to its rightful owner."

"But who is the Man in Grey?"

The nurse showed her first symptom of disquietude.

"Oh," she said, drily, "I'm not telling."

Three pair of critical eyes were fixed on her face: Burnville questioning, Laura almost angry, Nick Ross manifestly dubious.

"Not yet. Whoever he was," went on the nurse, "planned an almost perfect crime."

She paused. She had not yet heard the evening train sweep out across the viaduct. She studied her wrist watch. It still lacked half an hour of train time. She knew what she meant to do.

"He planned an almost perfect crime," she repeated. "Yet he did not calculate upon two accidents. There was the accident that Harry Burnville, the innocent agent, wiped his greasy hands on the telegram. There was the further accident that Laura Winright, finding the telegram with the hand-print, impetuously jumped at a wrong conclusion. Even then, we'd have found out nothing if I hadn't, once upon a time, read the lines of Adam Winright's hand. His hand showed a careful, methodical man——"

The old, sceptical smile faintly lit Burnville's face.

"Palmistry?"

"Certainly. A sure, safe guide, too, Mr. Burnville.

I had Adam Winright's hand-print. I read it after Laura told me her suspicions. I had a great flash of light when you, Mr. Burnville, turned up those threatening letters in this drawer." She tapped the table. "A man's hand will tell the dominant note in his nature. Adam Winright's hand showed a dominant note of order. The careless thrusting of these letters into a drawer was, for him, unnatural. He might be alarmed; still, he would arrange them chronologically and find a place for them. The dominant note will prevail, no matter what the disturbance. Threats may inspire a man to new courses of action, yet they will be the courses which fit in naturally with his character."

"I understand," agreed Burnville.

"Your enquiry, Mr. Burnville, attached no significance to this circumstance, though. In fact, you never noticed it. I did, instantly. It was the vital point in your entire enquiry. I know Adam Winright would not drop those papers carelessly into a drawer—I knew he could not entrust them to another party—hence, I knew he could not have seen them."

"Forgeries?" interjected Ross, sharply.

Miss Adair threw him an enquiring glance.

"Forgeries. Why? Evidently to mislead any chance pursuer. Hence I argued that the shabby man in grey, slinking about Castle Sunset, must be also a forgery, and for the identical purpose. His presence was a bit too obtrusive. He might be the real criminal, but in his role of man in grey he merely masqueraded, to throw us off the track. Oh, the whole episode was worked out very skilfully, I'll admit. It deceived you, Mr. Burnville, and you aren't any fool in this game. Yet you were so positive that the man in grey who received the telegram was the actual culprit that you never tried to puzzle out *the* telegram incident by itself.

"It was a shrewd scheme," pursued the nurse. "Only, it took no account of the lines of Adam Winright's hand. The criminal couldn't juggle with them. They told me that Adam Winright never saw those papers. From that, the next step was easy. If the dominant note of Adam Winright's hand was system, the dominant note of the crime was forgery."

"A curious theory!" Burnville's scepticism would not down.

"But"—Laura Winright still clung to the main issue—"who sent the burr?"

Miss Adair shrugged her shoulders. Still, she had not heard that train sweep across the viaduct.

"Maybe I'm wrong," she admitted, modestly. "Perhaps I'd better tell you what I think, and let you judge. I decided that the threatening letters were a bait to mislead Mr. Burnville or anyone else who might investigate. The man in grey was a will o' the wisp, to be chased but never caught. I had to brush all that rubbish out of my mind. I had to get back to a motive. Very likely Adam Winright's past would furnish the motive. . . . Then I learned of Lucile Meloche."

"That was the same woman Pat mentioned!" exclaimed Burnville.

"Precisely. You hadn't the wide horizon, Mr. Burnville. That's where you failed. You kept close to the immediate trail. You hunted the obvious criminal, oh, so relentlessly, so thoroughly! I went back thirty years. I hunted Lucile Meloche. I very nearly had to tell you about her . . . but as chance would have it, you were in Buffalo, and I met Pat . . . and he, bless him, he told us where she was!"

"Pat!" The detective went scarlet.

"The same! Then I found from her that the man she had married was, not Adam Winright, but his brother

Harold. Such a charming scapegrace Harold must have been! You know a bit of the story, Mr. Burnville. It never occurred to you to link up this fellow who was dead and gone with a disreputable roustabout who was trying to blackmail his brother. Or, if it did occur to you——"

"Now, Miss Adair," protested Burnville, "you do me a grave injustice. It did occur to me. I fancied that Harold Winright might still be living, in spite of his reported death, and that he might be the man in grey. Of course you won't believe me."

"I do, readily."

"I traced him to Woodlawn cemetery."

"As we did."

Laura interposed.

"Glory? Who did it?"

Glory had ceased listening for the outgoing train. Staring past her auditors into the darkness, she had found a white spot beyond the vines of the porch. She shivered. She could not tell them the truth till that spot had vanished.

"Tell me," insisted Laura.

"Mr. Burnville," said the nurse, "you know what Lawyer Airth told this young lady this very afternoon?"

Burnville nodded.

"I found it out," he added. "It's absolutely true."

"Did you find out, too, that Adam Winright was unhappy in his short married life at Detroit? The few who knew the Winrights there thought him a hard man to get along with. On the side of Mary Hastings, it was a money match—and his money seemed most persistently to go elsewhere. She died just after her boy was born. Tom Winright. The records show that. And this young lady here is no more a Winright than I am. Adam Winright took her because he felt sorry for her—that's all."

Another nod from Burnville.

"Adam Winright," pursued the nurse, "first came to Detroit in 1887. He worked for Colonel Annisford, who had a small store. Lucile Meloche—she's Lucile Villard now—never knew her husband had a brother till shortly before the divorce. She says Harold Winright was afraid of her. She had an untamed southern temper in those days, and made threats that scared him. That was before life had beaten her into submission. In those last threatened days, Harold Winright did mention to her a brother at Detroit. As a matter of fact, Adam Winright did not appear in Detroit till after Harold was divorced. He, in turn, mentioned to friends there that Harold was coming to join him on a hunting trip. Then Harold was drowned; jumped from a steamer. His body came ashore, and Adam Winright identified him, and he was buried in Woodlawn cemetery under a beautiful stone."

"It was a stone wall to me," said Burnville.

"And to me. I told myself, Mr. Burnville, this man in grey could not be Harold Winright. Harold Winright was dead. There was his grave. The motive was not back there. Lucile had no motive. Her husband's brother had been kind to her, had wished to marry her, and her anger was dead in her husband's grave. Her son, wherever he was, knew nothing of her or her wrongs, and had no incentive to seek vengeance on his uncle. The motive must be nearer home—nearer to Castle Sunset, in the breast of some one who had ready access to the Ghost Room and had found this poisoned burr." She turned abruptly on Burnville.

"What did you do with that envelope I gave you—the long envelope that contained the will?"

Burnville opened his portfolio.

"Here it is."

"Adam Winright's hand is orderly. This envelope is lying on the shelves because he placed it there for a pur-

pose to remind him to change his will. The will itself is put away safely where it cannot be disturbed. The man in grey went through the book-shelves and found the empty envelope. There are figures on it. What do they suggest to you, Mr. Burnville——?"

"A date?"

"Or the combination of a safe?"

She put her portfolio on the table, and snapped open the catch. Yet from time to time her eyes turned to the open windows, and the vines, where she could still fancy the ghostly face of the man in grey.

She produced a photograph, and a parcel. Patiently she untied the parcel. Yes, that train *must* be late.

"Laura," she commanded, "bring me your father's photograph—the one on the mantel."

Her eyes flashed upon the carpet.

"Just notice, Mr. Burnville, how this carpet is laid. There's a jog on the inner side of the room; the carpet, even if taken up to be dusted, must always be relaid in the identical position. What do those worn spots tell you? There's a spot worn bare at the door, and another where the windows open; another where people often crossed to the fire-place; another where your machine, Ross, used to be. And the barest spot of all—there——"

"Opposite the shelves?"

"Opposite the spot where the wall jogs in. There's your safe. In that wall, behind those books. . . . No, Mr. Burnville. Ross will find it. Where is that Ghost Book? I want you to compare certain dates—the dates of the grey man's visitations here with these notes of mine. I took these notes this morning from the time-clock records at the Winright store."

She had raised her voice. It could be heard on the lawn. Now she took the photograph Laura handed her,

and laid beside it the photograph of Harold Winright which Lucile Meloche had given her at Grimsby.

"This," she said, "is Adam Winright at fifty. Notice, his cheek rests on his hand, showing a bit of the inner wrist. This is Harold Winright at twenty-two; it shows the hands, as quite often happened before posing became an art. Here is my microscope, Laura. Look at those wrists."

Laura stared through the glass.

"I can't make out anything."

"How many lines—bracelets, we palmists call them—are on Adam Winright's wrist?"

Laura studied in silence. Across the room, Ross was ruthlessly dumping the books from the shelves. Finishing his task, he stared at a blank wall.

"The top of that wainscot," suggested the nurse. "Try it with your finger. . . . How many lines, Laura?"

"Two, on dad's wrist."

"Each bracelet meaning, according to some palmists, approximately twenty-six years of life. In this case they told the truth. And on the wrists of Harold Winright—Harold, who was drowned at twenty-three?"

Laura gazed painfully through the microscope.

"I have it," cried Ross. "I have it, Miss Adair." Beneath the pressure of his finger, the wainscot slid downward, disclosing a miniature vault with whose combination he was wrestling.

The nurse glanced up.

"Bring me the will when you find it. Well, Laura—Harold Winright was drowned at twenty-three. His wrist will show one bracelet."

"No. Two."

Glory's eyes shone. She was not bewildered, but triumphant. "That tells me," she cried, "just what Adam

Winright's will must tell us all in some form or other—let me have it, Ross——"

He had found it, in the little vault, on top of an orderly pile of books and papers.

Burnville rose, pushing away the time-clock records.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, oddly.

Glory Adair read slowly, her clear voice audible to the furthest corners of the room:

"I, Harold Winright, commonly known as Adam Winright, of the city of Detroit, Wayne county, state of Michigan, merchant, make this my last will and testament, hereby revoking any wills or contrary testamentary dispositions by me at any time heretofore made.

"I hereby nominate and appoint my partner, George Annisford, of the said city of Detroit, sole executor of this my will.

"I desire to solemnly establish that, in the year 1889, in fear of threats that had with justice been made against me, I came to Detroit, there giving my name as Adam Winright; and that, to protect myself from a menace I deserved, I identified a body washed ashore as that of Harold Winright—myself.

"That I have since repented these and other things which cannot be undone; that I have since paid to the full the penalty of mistakes I then made, is neither here nor there.

"I now bequeath to my loyal partner, George Annisford, one hundred shares of the capital stock of Winright's, Incorporated, from my holdings in that company to the intent that, as manager, he shall also have a controlling interest.

"To my son, Thomas Winright, I will, devise and bequeath the sum of twenty thousand dollars in cash, together with the income from one hundred shares of the

capital stock of Winright's, Incorporated, from my holdings thereof."

Miss Adair paused.

"There is a pencilled note, on the margin, opposite that bequest," she commented. "It reads, 'Convert into an annuity.'"

The auditors exchanged significant glances.

"I will, devise and bequeath the sum of fifty thousand dollars in the stock of Winright's, Incorporated, to my adopted daughter, Laura Winright."

Laura uttered a little cry, and hid her face. Glory Adair read relentlessly on.

"And all the rest, residue and remainder of my estate, after the payment of my just debts, funeral and testamentary expenses, and after provision for the foregoing bequests, I will, devise and bequeath to my eldest son, Nicol Harold Winright, commonly known as Nicol Ross."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ESCAPE OF THE MAN IN GREY

Nick Ross—Nicol Winright—took Laura's hands in his. It was all, seemingly, a great surprise to him. He had been a chauffeur a few hours ago. Now—he did not trouble to comprehend it.

"He was a blamed good friend, anyway," he whispered. "I'd rather have him than a billion dollars."

"But the man in grey?" persisted Laura, blindly. "How—and why—and who——?"

"The man in grey," said Glory, gently, "did not need to be in the Ghost Room that night to strike home——"

Burnville, gripping the time-clock records angrily, seemed about to speak.

"The man in grey," pursued Glory, "might have been hundreds of miles away. He had his scheme planned, his weapon chosen, his alibi established by the witness whose word would go furthest—by you, Harry Burnville. The telegram was just an opportune accident for him. He snatched the opportunity. He mailed the telegram to you, from Maitland Port—it took the place, perhaps, of some other cunning scheme—and he had time—plenty of time—to get out of town unnoticed, to reach Detroit, to establish a still more unchallengeable alibi."

Burnville found voice.

"It's incontestable," he cried. "Every entry in that Ghost Book corresponds with a day when the time clock at Winright's wasn't punched. That twenty-fifth of May, the day I was waiting here, he punches the time-

clock in mid-afternoon. Yet—it's so horrible, and it was so—so incredible! So amazing an alibi! That very telephone message from Detroit at the moment I was handed the telegram at Maitland Port——"

Laura, with a cry, started up. She knew, now, and the horror of it was mingled with another, pallid horror that her eyes had just glimpsed beyond the vines of the porch.

"Oh, oh!" she moaned.

Burnville, stepping to the switch, flashed on the porch light.

"He's there! I'll get him!" So speaking, he plunged boldly into the darkness.

Glory Adair halted Ross.

"Stay here," she commanded. "Call Mrs. MacTurk. There—I've pressed the button. She'll be here instantly. Whoever the man was"—still she pretended doubt—"he must have heard every word we said."

Running, she overtook Burnville at the gate. Hastily she clutched his sleeve. He tried to tear himself loose from her detaining grasp.

"He went that way—toward the river—down the long flight of steps. If we hurry, we can catch him yet—only I stumbled——"

"You know who he is?" warned Glory.

She still clung to his sleeve.

"Yes. And I'll get him."

"No."

"Yes, I say."

In the distance she heard a low rumble, like thunder, and she laughed, softly. "Oh, very well. . . ."

They came to the head of a long flight of steps leading to the road that wound round from the river to the harbour.

"See," said Glory, pointing far up the river to a faint halo overhanging the trees, "that's the train."

"We must hurry," cried Burnville. "He'll get away. I wish . . . no, I daren't stop to telephone. I can't lose him again."

In the shadows she saw the glow of his dark eyes, and knew that his soul was intent on the chase. She shrugged her shoulders. The train would come and go again while they were running the distance. And she did not mean Burnville to run.

"You'd catch him—to what end?" she argued. "What good will it do?"

"What good?"

"That's just the difference between us," she added, softly. "You, Harry Burnville, are the genuine detective; I am merely the amateur investigator. You insist on catching your criminal—that is for you the one end to be attained. I am satisfied to solve my problem—and be merciful."

"Merciful! To a murderer?"

"No. Merciful to Laura Winright. Merciful to her father's memory. Merciful to Lucile Villard, who loved him, never knowing that he still lived—that he had obliterated himself in fear of her revenge—that he was caring for her son. Yes, and merciful to you."

In silence they reached the foot of the steps, and turned into a weed-grown path. Burnville seemed ever striving to quicken his pace. The nurse refused to be hurried.

"What would Laura Winright think?" she demanded.

"He is a murderer," persisted Burnville. "The meanest of all murderers. He killed as his mother married—for mere money."

"What of Lucile Villard? Would it make her any happier to know that, though she forgave, the poisoned burr did not?"

Burnville smiled, darkly.

"*You* are an enigma," he said. "You solve a problem

that quite baffles me, and then—then you throw away the glory of it."

Along the viaduct above them swept the incoming train, and up the dark face of the hill. The two watched it."

"It's a long way to the station," muttered Burnville. His one absorption was still the pursuit. "Yet—we might reach it."

"We might," commented Glory Adair, "even now. But —I do not think we will."

Cedars, wild and overgrown, hid the face of the cliff with a tangled cloak. On the soft evening air the pungent scent hung heavy. They could hear the pounding of the breakers on the Huron shore; and in a dull, far off way the monotonous song of the river plashing over its host of tiny waterfalls.

Burnville surrendered.

"Perhaps it's best—but you are wonderful."

"Am I?"

He halted, and, gripping her hands, gazed into her eyes. All about them hung thick shadows.

"Glory Adair," he cried, "glorious Glory Adair—you and I, as partners, could take this old world by storm. You are a genius. And if I might dare look up at you— I, who have miserably failed——"

"You have not always failed. You've handled difficult cases well. I rather envy you certain of your exploits. And—I appreciate——"

"And you are willing?"

Daringly he drew nearer.

"No," she answered. "I am not."

"My record is against me?"

She smiled in the darkness.

"It's not that, Mr. Burnville. There's one reason— only one—why I say no. I am free. I prefer to stay free. Laura Winright may take unto herself a master

and be known by her master's name, but—not so with Glory Adair."

He shrugged his shoulders. Her look grew apologetic.

"Now, that's not exactly correct," she added, hastily. "There's another reason, more important still. Monday, I am going on a case. Typhoid—it's good for weeks."

He laughed, mirthlessly.

"We are friends, anyway?"

"Not the least objection."

Passing tall white lumber piles and shadowy freight cars, they reached the innermost fringe of harbour. Afar they heard the clang of a bell, and the puffing and grinding of a locomotive. The outgoing train with many lighted coaches emerged from the shadows of the cliff-face and swept behind them across the long viaduct. They gazed at one another.

"Well," said Burnville, "he's gone. That's the last we'll ever see of—of the Man in Grey."

They walked on. Close to them the harbour waters rippled darkly against the piles. Glancing up the cedar-clothed cliff, they glimpsed at its crest the faint lights of Castle Sunset.

"Less than twenty-four hours ago," murmured Glory, "Tom and Laura Winright were heir and heiress. Now, Nick Ross is master up there. Oh, what a queer world this is! To think that the boy Adam Winright left to fight his own way in the world and prove himself a man was his own flesh and blood—and the girl he reared in luxury was a foundling."

Silently they went through the black tunnel of the grain elevator. Beyond, gloomy structures loomed in the uncertain light, and underfoot walking was hard; but presently they stumbled forth into an open space.

Far ahead, at the edge of the wharf, a little crowd had gathered. People came hurrying to it from the hill. Glory

glimpsed tiny lights out on the harbour, which revealed dark blotches drifting to and fro. Then grew distinct the murmur of voices and the slow plash of oars.

She gripped Burnville's arm.

"Come!" she cried.

Across the wharf they hurried, dodging scattered planks and heavy cables. Running nimbly, the girl discerned that one of the lights was a lantern, held by one of two men in an open boat. Further out, another boat bobbed darkly to and fro.

"What is it?" demanded Burnville.

The group nearest was a bubble of discordant question and answer.

"He didn't fall in, I tell you . . . jumped right in . . . No, he wasn't drunk . . . trying to rescue some one. . . . I was standin' right here, an' he ran up an' yelled for some one to git a boat—there was a girl fell in. . . . No, I didn't see no girl fall in. It's just some of them kids fakin' they're drowndin' an' yellin' fer help. That's all. . . . Oughter be arrested? You just bet they oughter. There's too much of that sort of damned foolin'. . . . No, I didn't know him. Old Pete Shippey, I thought. He had grey whiskers, 's near 's I could see. . . . Oh, look there, they've got him. . . . No, they haven't. . . . See here, I'm dead sure I saw a girl fall in. It was a canoe upset. . . . Anyway, he's mighty plucky, to plunge right in with his duds on. And if he don't come back the town oughter put up a monument. . . ."

The discord surged on.

Glory Adair drew closer to Burnville.

"A man's fundamental nature does not change," she whispered. "You'll see that soon. He forged a letter from Adam Winright to Laura to give colour to the hypothesis of heart failure. Now, when he's in a corner—

when the game's up—he's forging for himself a hero's death. He's carrying deceit—forgery—right through to the end."

A cry rose from one of the boats. A hoarse whisper went round among the watchers.

"They've got him!"

Voices came from one of the darkly moving craft. "Pull hard, you!" cried one.

A shadowy thing seemed to creep slowly up the grey-white side of the boat. A lantern, swung close, threw its light on a bedraggled face.

A cry rang out, shocked, poignant, across the rippling darkness.

"Good God, fellows—it's Tom Winright!"

THE END

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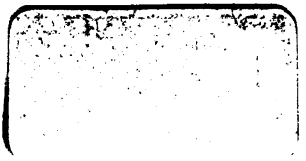
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